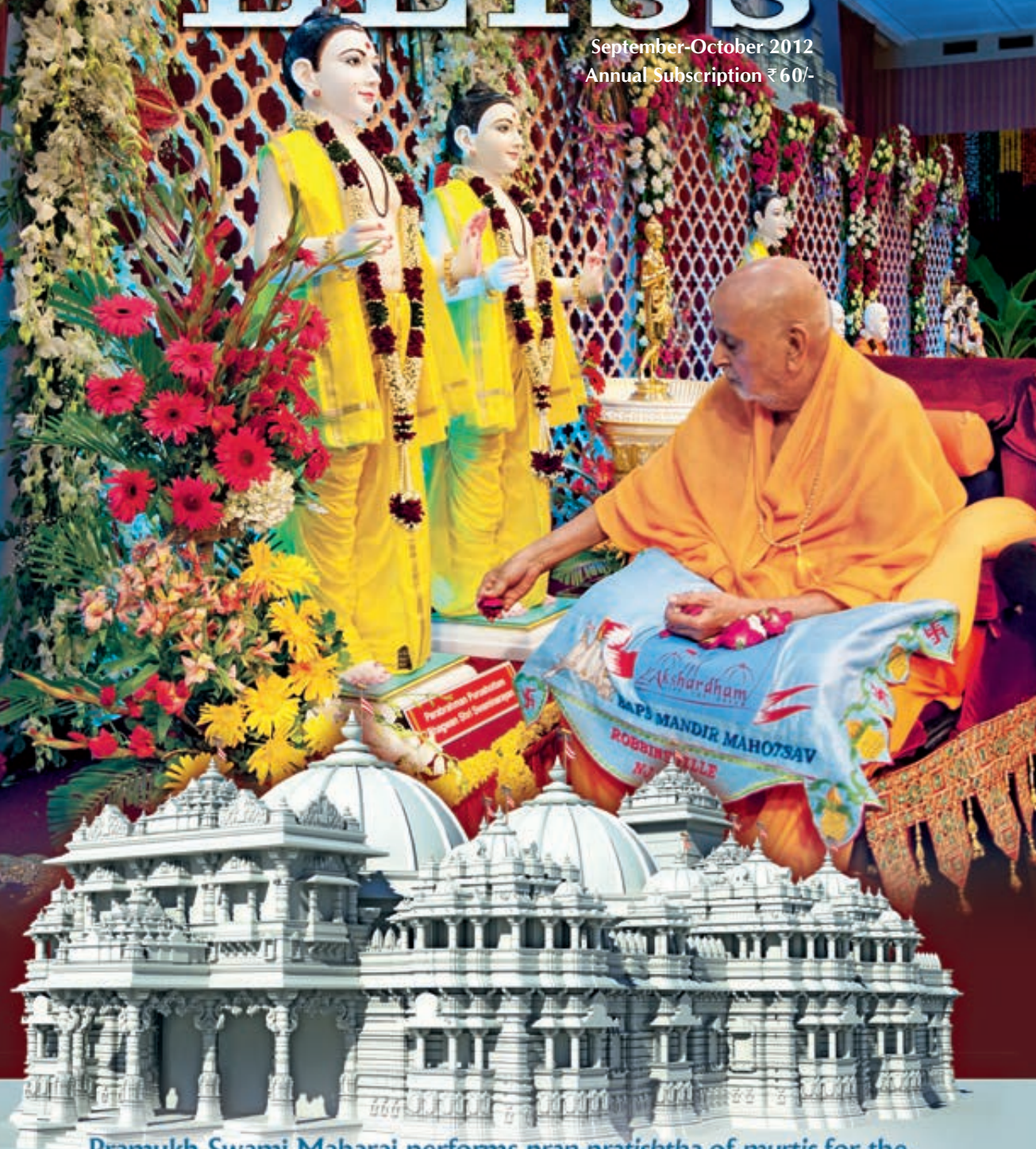


SWAMINARAYAN BLISS

September-October 2012

Annual Subscription ₹ 60/-



Pramukh Swami Maharaj performs *pran-pratishtha* of murtis for the
BAPS Shikharbaddh Mandir in New Jersey
at the BAPS Mandir in Ahmedabad, 22 July 2012



**SWAMISHRI IN AHMEDABAD
Rakshabandhan, 2 August 2012**

1-2. Swamishri blesses devotees on the auspicious occasion of Rakshabandhan. Rakhdhis from the garland offered to Swamishri were distributed to all the devotees present (2 August 2012). Devotees engaged in Swamishri's darshan on the mandir grounds.

(Photos: BAPS youths)



Akshar Purushottam Maharaj

In April 1978 Pramukh Swami Maharaj inspired and inaugurated the first issue of *Swaminarayan Bliss* in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. The bi-monthly magazine serves to enlighten BAPS youths, seniors and well-wishers about the glory of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy and the Gunatit guru *parampara*. It also seeks to inspire the universal values and traditions of Hinduism to pursue a happy and peaceful life by serving God and humankind.

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Published & Printed by: Swaminarayan
Aksharpathi, Shahibaug, Ahmedabad -
380004, India

SUBSCRIPTION RATES Outside India (By Air Mail)

	Rupees	Pounds	US Dollars	India Rupees
1 Year	630	9	14	60
2 Years	1300	18	28	110
3 Years	1900	27	42	160



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First Word

Swami Vivekanand revealed in his speech at Victoria Hall, Madras, “I see that each nation, like each individual, has one theme in life, which is its centre, the principal note round which every other note comes to form the harmony. In one nation political power is its vitality, as in England. Artistic life in another, and so on. In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life; and if any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality, that nation dies, if it succeeds in the attempt. If you succeed in the attempt to throw off your religion and take up either politics or society, or any other thing as your centre, as the vitality of your national life, the result will be that you will become extinct.”¹

In our present age we find ourselves increasingly drawn towards a material-centric life. Our desires for wealth, fame and indulgence in material pleasures have taken an upward spiral. So, we often care less for things that are right and honourable, and instead seek opportunities to pamper our senses. The first tenet of Hinduism is humaneness, that is, cultivating *satya*, *daya*, *ahimsa*, *brahmacharya* and *asteya*. Then comes the consolidation of faith in God.

The entire Hindu way of life pivots around morality and faith. Having these two requisites enable one to bring order in life and discipline discordant elements. Mahatma Gandhi emphasized on right education by saying, “If the education you get turns you away from God, I do not know how it is going to help you and how you are going to help the world.”²

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has lucidly given a moral and spiritual compass to all individuals in his Shikshapatri. He has guaranteed that anyone who observes the do’s and don’ts prescribed therein will be happy in this life and the life hereafter. He has given the five cardinal moral disciplines of non-stealing, non-addiction, vegetarian diet, no illicit sex and social purity for all mankind.

Once, Shriji Maharaj visited the village of Gamf in Gujarat. A female devotee named Avalba invited Maharaj to her home for lunch. She had decided to prepare the meal herself but her mother told her that she would like to cook the meal and do the *seva*. Avalba agreed and Maharaj came to eat at noon. After eating, Maharaj suddenly vomited the food. Avalba said, “Maharaj, some irritant must have got into the food.” Shriji Maharaj replied, “There was nothing wrong with the food, but your mother’s *niyams* are not as pure and staunch as yours.” Avalba was a little upset with her mother and felt that Maharaj would go hungry. Maharaj assured Avalba that he would stay for the day and that she could prepare a meal for him in the evening.

On many occasions Shriji Maharaj discoursed and emphasized on the importance of observing *niyams*. To imbibe moral disciplines Bhagwan Swaminarayan advises on the practice of daily satsang and associating with a God-realized guru. In so doing, one is able to stave off *kusang*, the lure of sense objects and please God.

As Hindus and devotees of Bhagwan Swaminarayan the more we identify ourselves with our values, culture and spirituality the more anchored we become to Satsang. Thereafter, following our *niyams* and faith becomes natural and blissful. Pramukh Swami Maharaj often stresses that one should never forget that our culture espouses honesty, self-restraint, tolerance, faith in God and respect for parents. The more we align ourselves with our cultural and spiritual roots the happier we become, because they are the fundamentals around which our vitality and happiness revolve upon. ♦

1. Swami Vivekananda. *To the Youth of India*. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2002, p. 66-67.

2. Gandhiji, M.K. *Issues for Students*. New Delhi: Farsight Publishers and Distributors, 2009, p.14.

Shakotsav in Loya

In Loya, Shri Hari pleases his sadhus and devotees by cooking brinjals and serving to them...

TRADITION OF SHAKOTSAV

Sangha Patel, a devotee, lived in Loya, behind Sura Khachar's *darbar*. Some sadhus were cooking a meal there. Shriji Maharaj had commanded his sadhus that after giving up the *paramhansa diksha* and accepting the Vaishnav sadhu *diksha*, they should prepare meals by themselves, offer them to Thakorji and then eat. So, at that time Nishkulanand Swami was cooking rice and *khichdi*, Nityanand Swami and Vaishnavanand Swami were preparing chapattis and the remaining sadhus were making other items.

Once, Shri Hari observed their efforts and enthusiasm and said, "Since you are all making food items I feel that I too should make something and serve it to you."

"Maharaj, what item will you make?" Sura Khachar avidly asked.

Shri Hari replied, "Order brinjals from Gadhada and I will cook them. I'll add curd, gram flour, coriander, turmeric (*haldi*) and other condiments to make it taste like ambrosia (*amrut*)."

Jivuba and Laduba asked, "How much brinjals should we order?"

Maharaj replied, "Five hundred kgs."

They enquired further, "What will you use to

cook them: oil or ghee?"

Shri Hari smiled and replied, "I eat ghee, so order 100 kg of ghee. And to make other items order 200 kg of wheat flour and 60 kg *khichdi*."

Within a short time, the provisions Maharaj had ordered arrived. The meal was going to be cooked on the grounds of Sangha Patel's house. The next day a cartload of brinjals arrived. Shri Hari had them washed and stuffed with spices. Then Maharaj mixed gram flour with curd and added it to the pots containing brinjals. In each pot he added 20kg of ghee and then cooked them. The other food items were prepared by sadhus. Once everything was ready, Shri Hari sat down for his meal. While he ate the cooked brinjals and the food items prepared by sadhus Shri Hari occasionally drank water, moved his hand



over his stomach and praised the brinjals. Sura Khachar joked, “Maharaj, we will know only after you finish your meal and serve us.”

Maharaj added, “Have patience. Once I finish eating, I’ll serve the sadhus first and then all of you.” After eating, Maharaj served the cooked brinjals to the sadhus and devotees, all of whom relished them. Shri Hari then washed his hands and sat on a high seat. Mulji Brahmachari pointed out, “Maharaj, you’ll have to change your dhoti because it is stained with turmeric, chilli and ghee.” Shri Hari looked at his dhoti and commented, “While cooking it is obvious that one’s clothes will get dirty. I’ll keep them on for the time being and change them when I go for a bath in the evening.”

Two to three days later, some devotees arrived from Kholadiyad for Maharaj’s darshan. Among them, Mula Adale told Shri Hari, “Maharaj, we would like to sponsor a meal. We have brought 360kg of freshly prepared ghee. Ask what you wish to eat, and we will prepare it.”

Shri Hari replied, “Look, the devotees here will make the other food items, but if you order brinjals I will cook them myself.”

The devotee asked, “How much brinjals should we order?”

Maharaj stated, “Twelve hundred kilogrammes.” Shriji Maharaj told Sura Khachar to order the brinjals. He ordered them from the villages of Chuda and Ranpur. In no time, cartloads of brinjals were being unloaded in Loya.

BRINJALS COOKED IN 360KG OF GHEE

Shri Hari cooked brinjals with 360kg of ghee. In addition, *rotlas* (flat bread made of millet flour) and *khichdi* were also prepared. Maharaj told Sura Khachar, “Bapu, in spite of I having tested these sadhus through tough trials, their staunch faith in me has seen them through. Now, they have become ideal sadhus and can inspire values and morality in others. I

have made the foundation of Satsang deep. Till the earth remains Satsang will flourish and the pathway to *moksha* will remain open through the Gunatit Satpurush (guru). My devotion to sadhus lies in pleasing them through serving meals and making them happy.”

Sura Khachar’s eyes turned moist at Shri Hari’s words. He felt, “How easily Purushottam Narayan, the supreme God, has become available for ordinary souls like him. Maharaj had first tolerated intense hardships and then put his sadhus to the test. He has subdued his divine powers to become human and showered his compassion on aspirants. Furthermore, he has blessed them with the realization of his divinity.”

On seeing Sura Khachar pondering, Maharaj answered, “Sura Khachar, this is the eternal way of how God works. He exhibits the dualities of victory and defeat, fear and courage, and shuns material pleasures and indulges in them. But all his actions are divine. Ordinary people fail to understand them.”

ONE WHO LACKS ATMABUDDHI FOR SATSANG IS OUTSIDE IT DESPITE BEING IN IT

“Maharaj, when the evil-minded speak critically of you our hearts throb with agitation,” Sura Khachar spoke with a tinge of anger.

“But Bapu, that is how the evil-minded behave. I have declared details about my parent’s clan and lineage on several occasions. But those who are averse to Satsang will bad-mouth and say such false things,” Shri Hari said.

“Maharaj, the words of those who oppose from the outside do not worry me, but those who are against Satsang from the inside hurts me.”

“Listen Bapu, those who say such things are in fact outside Satsang. Those who do not have *atmabuddhi* for Satsang even if they wear saffron clothes or *kanthi* and *tilak-chandlo* I believe them to be non-*satsangis*.” And so saying,

Maharaj said, “Come, let us go and prepare *shak* (cooked spicy vegetables).”

Shantiba (Sura Khachar’s wife), Jivuba, Laduba and other lady devotees had by then made *rotlas*, *khichdi*, saffron scented milk and *biranj* for Shri Hari.

“I CANNOT COOK LIKE YOU.”

Shri Hari sat down to have lunch. He praised, “The taste of *biranj* is so delicious that it cannot be compared with the taste of *shak*.”

Laduba replied, “Maharaj, the taste of *biranj* is not as good as your *shak*. The *shak* is like ambrosia (*amrut*) because you have made it.”

Shri Hari smiled and added, “But Muktanand Swami says that since women cook meals daily their food is always good. He had once praised the *shak* I had made here in the past. But later he said that it was a bit salty. So, I cannot cook like you.”

THE SADHUS ARE YOUR HOME

The ladies found the words of Shri Hari quite intriguing. They argued, “Maharaj, it is you who have given us the intelligence to make it.”

“Yes, that’s true. But what of the giver of intelligence when his own intelligence is of little use to himself!” Shri Hari’s words amused all. At that time Mulji Brahmachari came and informed Maharaj, “The sadhus have sat down and are waiting to be served food. Will you come to serve or shall I serve them?” Maharaj got up instantly and praised, “Let’s go. Sadhus are dear to me. By pleasing them the Satsang will spread and grow.”

Shri Hari generously served *shak* to the sadhus, *parshads* and devotees. No one took any other food item except *shak*. Shri Hari declared, “This *biranj* is worth eating, take a little. I have just praised it, and if you do not take it then I’ll be proved wrong.”

The lady devotees heard his words of praise and were pleased. When Shri Hari returned

to the *darbar* the lady devotees commented, “Maharaj, we were proved right when we praised the taste of the *shak*; it was better than the *biranj* we made.” Maharaj simply smiled and appreciated their devotion for him.

SHRI HARI CHURNS BUTTERMILK

Every three to four days Maharaj travelled to the nearby village of Nagadka and then returned to Loya. Today, Maharaj went to Nagadka with several sadhus and devotees. Early next morning Maharaj completed his daily rituals and was sitting on the verandah of Sura Khachar’s *darbar*. In the house opposite to him Shantiba was churning buttermilk to produce butter by pulling a pair of ropes tied to a churning rod. Soon, Shantiba was exhausted and sweating profusely. Shri Hari asked, “Shantiba, why are you churning alone?”

“Maharaj, my daughter, Valu, has gone to fetch water so I’m doing it alone. The butter has not yet surfaced,” breathed Shantiba. Then Maharaj got up and told her, “Give me the ropes and let me help you churn.” Shantiba tried to stop Maharaj, but Shri Hari took the ropes in his hands. Shantiba then got hold of the other ends and they both started pulling. When Sura Khachar came and saw this divine darshan of Maharaj he was overjoyed. He felt how fortunate and divine his place, the occasion, his wife, Shantiba, and everything was. Soon Shantiba announced, “Maharaj, now stop. The butter has surfaced.” The divine *lila* of Maharaj became forever etched in the minds of Shantiba and others. ♦

(Contd. in next issue)

Translated from Gujarati text of
Bhagwan Swaminarayan by Shri H.T. Dave

ADHYĀY 2

BRĀHMI STHITI YOGA: Free of Attachment, Fear and Anger

Part 13



Character building is one of the biggest and most widely held ambitions of today. A large number of people in today's society suffer mental and intellectual stress due to an underdeveloped character. They constantly strive to build their character. They try to build their character by developing their skills, but when they fall short of those skills

or obtain those skills they do not experience tangible progress in their lives. In fact their misery escalates. As a result, they often develop an inferiority complex, are sometimes overcome with fear, sometimes become too offensive, and sometimes even become destructive. They behave pretentiously, become deceitful and obstinate. They are out of even their own control. Such flaws continually increase and they sink into an ocean of grief.

In order to save us from such situations, the Bhagavad Gita teaches us about the *sthitapragna* state. The *sthitapragna* state is a reservoir of positive thoughts. Within it lies the secret to a true and complete character. Shri Krishna Bhagwan wants to develop Arjuna's character, and that is why he gives him the deep understanding of the *sthitapragna* state. Previously, with the words, '*dukkheshvanudvignamanāhā sukheshu vigataspruhaha*' (Gita 2.56) Shri Krishna gave us the understanding of not lamenting in hard times or getting carried away in times of pleasure. Now, we will look at what he says thereafter.

THE STHITAPRAGNA HAVE NO ATTACHMENT, FEAR OR ANGER

Thereafter, Shri Krishna Bhagwan says, '*वीतरागभयक्रोधः स्थितधीर्मुनिरुच्यते*' – '*Veetarāgabhayakrodhaha sthitadheermuniruchyate*' (Gita 2.56), i.e., a person who is free of attachment, fear and anger is called steadyminded by the *munis*.

Rāga means attachment, thirst, longing, desire. The influences of attachment constantly occupy the mind. The root of the agony of both hardships and the thirst for happiness is attachment. As soon as one becomes attached to something, or someone, one begins to think in that direction. An intense desire to attain it arises and one begins to plan on how to attain it. Then, if that desire is satisfied one experiences a feeling of happiness. If that desire is not fulfilled, or its attainment is hindered, then one is overcome with feelings of misery and one develops hatred for those who have prevented its fulfilment. This makes one agitated. At such times, one's thoughts become paralysed and one is either overcome by fear or by rage.

Arjuna is in such a situation. Attachment to his family has taken control over his thoughts, and thus his thoughts flow in a manner suitable to that attachment. He has begun to make plans in that direction too. To him, the war is now an obstacle, and thus he has become the prey of mental agitation. So, Shri Krishna Bhagwan instructs him to rid himself of such attachment, fear and anger.

Attachment, fear and anger are a triplet of wickedness. Of them, attachment is like the ringleader; fear and anger are the reaction. Because there is attachment, there is fear. If attachment disappears, then so does everything else – fear, anger, etc. The *sthitapragna* state destroys attachment. Hence, one who attains that state is always free of attachment, fear and anger.

FREE OF ATTACHMENT

Etymologically, the word *rāga* comes from the verb root '*ranj*'. '*Ranj*' means 'to colour'. When a person becomes attached to anything or anyone, desire transforms their heart with its colours. That is why these desires are called *rāga*. It is not that one's brain shuts down at

such times, but whatever thoughts one has are in favour of those desires. The intellect is suppressed by the mighty force of attachment. At such times, it is very likely that one will misunderstand one's own thoughts and only one's own decisions seem correct. Only one's own behaviour seems appropriate. This is all the consequence of attachment.

Parabrahman Purushottam Bhagwan Swaminarayan has explained this with an example. He says, 'The mind is saturated with desires for the world. But, in the manner in which sesame seeds are imbued with scent by padding them between alternating layers of flowers' (Vachanamrut, Gadhada I 38).

In the past, there was a special method for making perfumes from flowers. A layer of whatever flower a fragrance is to be made out of was laid down. A layer of sesame seeds was laid on top of it. Many such layers of flowers and sesame seeds were alternately placed on top of each other, after which the stack was pressed with weights for a few days. This caused the fragrance of the flowers to permeate the sesame seeds. The oil extracted from the seeds is *attar*, with the fragrance of the flowers used.

The intent of this example is to show that our mind, i.e., *antahkaran*, is like the sesame seeds, and desires, i.e., attachment, are like the flowers. The *antahkaran* is permeated by the taint of the desires. Therefore, one's *antahkaran* becomes like one's desires.

Arjuna's *antahkaran* is permeated by such attachment. Therefore, his intellect makes decisions under its control. That is why Shri Krishna is telling him to rid himself of attachment.

The secret to being rid of attachment lies in the *sthitapragna* state. In the very first shloka in the description of the *sthitapragna* state, he has revealed this secret. He says, 'प्रजहाति यदा कामान् सर्वान् पार्थ मनोगतान्। आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते॥' – '*Prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān*

pārtha manogatān, ātmanyevātmanā tushtaha sthitapraghnastadochyate.’ – ‘O Arjuna! When a person abandons all the desires of the mind, and remains content with Paramātmā who resides within one’s own *ātmā*, he can be called *sthitapragna*’ (Gita 2.55).

How can someone who is completely satisfied have *rāga*? Once they have attained the utmost blissful Paramātmā, aversion to worldly pleasures is child’s play. The Gita tells us that once one becomes attached to Paramātmā, there is no scope for attachment to *māyā*.

The *satpurush* constantly rejoices in such a state of detachment.

Once, Pramukh Swami Maharaj was in Atlanta, USA. The kitchen volunteers brought a dish full of the day’s items to him. One volunteer asked Swamishri, ‘Which of these food items do you like?’ Swamishri immediately replied, ‘Whatever Paramātmā eats. We should eat whatever is offered to Paramātmā.’

In 1995, Swamishri went to London for the *murti-pratishtha* ceremony. A *haveli* was also under construction. Swamishri went to see the work. A British workman named Melvin was working there. Sadhu Brahmaviharidas talked to him about Swamishri’s vow of celibacy. Melvin was astonished. When Swamishri came near by, he immediately asked how long he had been observing celibacy for. ‘For sixty years,’ answered Sadhu Brahmaviharidas in English. Hearing this, Swamishri immediately said, ‘Not sixty, but seventy-five.’ (i.e., He has not had such desires since birth; his age at the time was seventy-five).

A scholarly sadhu, Sadhu Shrutiprakashdas, informed Pramukh Swami Maharaj of his wish that he had prayed in Chhapaiya that Pramukh Swami be honoured with the title of a *mahāmahopādhyāya* (a title for a great learned scholar). Hearing this, Swamishri said, ‘All of that is for scholars, we have found Swami and thus are already *mahāmahopādhyāyas*.’

FEARLESS

Fear is something completely internal. It is a disturbance of the mind. Some sort of fear constantly troubles us, as if it has spread its domination over all of mankind. Some are afraid of something, some are afraid of doing something, some are afraid of someone, insects, birds, animals or some situation. Some become afraid in the dark, others in solitude. Some are afraid of confined spaces, others are afraid of going outside. Some cannot stay alone, others get perplexed in crowds. Some are afraid of being insulted, others become afraid from the thought of making a mistake. Other than this, fear caused by thoughts of insecurity regarding wealth, business, family, friends, physical health or anything of the sort is common.

When we become frightened, an intense desire to move away from or be saved from the cause of fear arises. When there is a delay in this, our intellect gets disturbed and perplexed.

In scientific terms, this fear is called a phobia. There are many prevalent psychological methods to remove such fears; medicines are available too. Nevertheless, these methods or medicines do not give a person the feeling of complete fearlessness. On the other hand, the *sthitapragna* state mentioned in the Gita has the capacity to take us to a state of fearlessness. A person who has developed the *sthitapragna* state believes, “Paramātmā is the all-doer, he controls everything and is the highest authority. That Paramātmā is with me, in front of me, manifest.” For those who firmly develop such conviction in the form of Paramātmā, there is nothing in the world that they would fear. That is why the Gita openly questions, “Do you become afraid?” Do not worry. Attain the *sthitapragna* state in the form of Paramātmā and fearlessness will come by itself. You will never be afraid. You will then be able to live doubtlessly and fearlessly in this jungle-like world like a lion.

The *satpurush* is always fearless everywhere,

in every manner. The influence of his *sthitapragna* state gleams in his actions, thoughts and understanding. His intellect is filled with the highest level of *nirvikalp* faith in the supreme, all-doing, all-powerful form of Paramātmā. Therefore, he never becomes fearful of anyone, anywhere, in any manner. His *antahkaran* is continuously pure like a calm lake. His intellect remains extremely composed, unwavering like the flame of a candle in a windless location.

In 1981, the Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan were to be celebrated in Ahmedabad for 37 days. But, a few days before the festival was to start, the student riots broke out in Ahmedabad. The riots became more and more troublesome day by day. The situation was getting very tense. All the sadhus and volunteers involved in the festival were worried about whether the festival would take place or not? Preparations were in full swing, but the worry was of what would happen if there were riots during the festival, and people and property were damaged; that would be a big problem. Everyone turned to Swamishri. They gave a detailed description of the current situation and their fears. Everyone was sure that on hearing the matter he would think over it and cancel the celebrations. But Swamishri calmly listened to everyone and took their opinions. When everyone unanimously conveyed that they could not think of any other solution other than to cancel or postpone the festival. Swamishri fearlessly, firmly and calmly said, 'The celebrations will go on as planned. Maharaj will take care of everything; it is his work and he will do it. He will resolve the situation.' Swamishri's firm conviction and faith in Paramātmā echoed in his words. This was living proof of the *sthitapragna* state mentioned in the Gita. Swamishri's *sthitapragna* state removed the fear in the minds of all the organizers, and gave them renewed strength. Everyone continued the preparations without any fears,

and indeed, to everyone's astonishment, the situation was under control by the time the festival started. The celebrations took place without any problems.

Thus, the *sthitapragna* state of the Gita gives us a boon of fearlessness.

FREE OF ANGER

The third aspect is anger. Anger means rage. This is also an internal emotion. When someone hinders our intentions, our intellect is stricken, and as a result an explosion of anger rises against the hinderer.

In such circumstances, internal peace is disturbed. Our intellect is rendered unable to think clearly, and becomes subject to foolishness. The effect then proceeds to the physical level.

The blaze of anger can be seen in humans and animals. Many have seen the terrifying scene of a raging bull. Seeing the behaviour of lions, tigers, cats and dogs, one can sense their anger. Even ants do not fall back and continue to bite or sting. The same also applies to us. When a person is enveloped by a fit of anger, many physical and psychological effects occur. For example, their language changes – they begin to use foul or inappropriate words. Their eyes become red, their lips and other limbs begin to tremble. They do what should not be done. They make hasty decisions and immediately become restless to follow them. Blood pressure increases. One's pulse rate reaches unexpected levels and the heart is placed under stress. In this manner, these and other effects of anger cause many problems. A whirlwind or windstorm lasts only for a short while, but it may take years to recover from its damaging effects, if at all. The same applies to anger. In a storm of rage, one often loses the capacity to understand. One forgets the fact that the results of anger are usually much more devastating than its causes. Anger affects both sides, sometimes the person who becomes angry even more so.

That is why the Gita advises us to remain free of anger.

The *sthitapragna* state is a remedy for anger. The Gita says, 'कामात् क्रोधोऽभिजायते' – '*Kāmāt krodho'bhijāyate*' (Gita 2.62) – Desires are at the root of anger. One who has attained the *sthitapragna* state no longer has any mundane desires. If there are no roots, how can there be scope for anger to arise?

Moreover, one who has the firm conviction that nothing happens without the will of Paramātmā, whatever Paramātmā does is for our good, Paramātmā resides in the other person and is testing me and giving me a chance to correct my mistakes, etc., never has a fit of anger. Their *antahkaran*, which is like a calm lake, is never disturbed.

That is why the Gita says – Do you get angry? Do you have fits of rage? Do not worry. Become *sthitapragna*. Lessen your mundane desires, be content with the attainment of Paramātmā, and affirm the understanding that Paramātmā is the all-doer. Then, not even a ripple of anger will arise.

The *satpurush* is a living example of this. Due to the power of his *sthitapragna* state, there is not even the slightest chance for anger to arise.

In 1986, in Mumbai, Pragas Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj had a tumour removed from his thigh. After the operation he stayed at a devotee's house to rest. One day, a friend of the devotee came to meet Swamishri. He was an eminent politician, and was well-educated. He came near Swamishri and, instead of asking about his health, broke out in a fit of anger due to some prejudice he had developed. He bombarded Swamishri with foolish criticisms and harsh words. Even the commonest of men know that a sick person should be comforted, but here, a well-educated and responsible person did the opposite. There was no adversity in Swamishri's reaction. He remained extremely calm. He did not say a

single word in response. Not only that, when a nearby sadhu was about to rectify the man's inconsiderate approach, Swamishri prevented him. He let the man vent his thoughts. All who saw this scene were disheartened, rage began to pervade their minds; but Swamishri was free of anger – like the *sthitapragna* state mentioned in the Gita.

At around 4:45 p.m. on Tuesday, 24 September 2002, terrorists attacked the Akshardham monument in Gandhinagar. Within minutes there was widespread carnage. According to the Civil Hospital records, thirty-three innocent people lost their lives, which included a commando from the National Security Guard (NSG), two state commandoes, twenty-five visitors, four Akshardham volunteers and even a sadhu.

As the news of this assault on innocent people spread, public rage increased. Sixteen states including Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh proclaimed a public strike. A complete strike was observed in approximately thirty-five cities, such as, Delhi, Mumbai, Lucknow and Jaipur. Many governmental and non-governmental organizations began to think of an appropriate response. Many wanted to see an eye for an eye. At this moment, everyone was waiting to see the response of the creator of Akshardham, Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Many expected him to instruct his disciples to take vigorous revenge for this dreadful deed. Not only his disciples, but all the public of India would have accepted his command within seconds, causing the whole country to blaze in rage. But the response that Pramukh Swami gave in such a situation held the secret to world peace; it was the key to a happy life. It was the *sthitapragna* response. In a situation in which any person would become enraged, Pramukh Swami was calm. His undisturbed, composed mind and balanced power of judgement did not falter in the slightest. There

were no ripples in his lake of peace. As soon as he received the news, he began to pray to Bhagwan Swaminarayan: let there be no more terror, may the captives be safely released, may the deceased attain liberation, and may everyone gain the strength to bear this pain. (It should be remembered that when Swamishri went to the location of the incident a few days later, he went to wherever the victims had died and sprinkled sanctified water, praying for their liberation.) He also knew that the public would become angry at this incident and blood shedding riots could break out throughout the whole country. He therefore made an instant appeal to the public not to resort to violence in retaliation but to maintain peace. Indeed, that appeal saved the whole country from burning in the anger of terrorism. Countries all over the world were taken aback by the news of this terrorist attack, but they were even more struck with awe at the news of Pramukh Swami Maharaj's peaceful response. Everyone was even more surprised when Swamishri instructed that repair work take place such that all traces of the attack be removed. He knew that as long as the bullet marks remained, people's hearts would not be healed.

This response by Swamishri had a deep effect throughout the world. In fact, the person in charge of the NSG commando team was Brigadier Raj Sitapati. He had codenamed the operation 'Operation Thunderbolt'. However, on seeing that there were no retaliatory actions in Gujarat or any other state and that a peaceful atmosphere had been preserved, he said that the peace that can be seen in the public of the country is due to the peace appeal by Pramukh Swami Maharaj. This conduct of Pramukh Swami Maharaj is now termed as the 'Akshardham Response.'

When there was a case study on this entire event in a World Conference held in Heidelberg, Germany, all the attendees at the

conference praised Pramukh Swami's conduct and resolved that if there is an attack on any religious organization in the world, the response should be the 'Akshardham Response' and a forgive and forget philosophy should be applied.

On hearing about the whole incident and its after effects, the senator of New York and the chief of American Homeland security, Mr. Michael Balboni, said that by giving a peaceful response Pramukh Swami has probably given mankind the greatest gift of peace.

That is why, on 26 September 2002, when India's defense minister of the time, Mr. George Fernandes, came to meet Swamishri, he said, "Your words carry much weight. Not only did your words establish peace, but they have set a new precedence in the fight against terrorism."

Truly, Swamishri's appeal for peace is a reflection of the *sthitapragna* state mentioned in the Gita. His conduct represents the peaceful approach of the *sthitapragna* state.

If, like Pramukh Swami Maharaj, we imbibe this *sthitapragna* state in our lives, then the world would be free of many destructive events.

Thus, the single word of the Gita '*veetarāgabhayakrodhaha*' is the confluence of being free of attachment, fear and anger in the *sthitapragna* state.

CONCLUSION

With the words '*Duhksheshvanudvigna-manāhā sukheshu vigataspruhaha, veetarāgabhayakrodhaha sthitadheermuniruchyate*' (Gita 2.56), the Gita shows us the medicine to help cope with both pleasure and pain. It teaches us how to become free of attachment, fear and anger. The *sthitapragna* state is that medicine, it is that remedy; we just have to use it. ♦

Murti-Pratishtha Rituals of BAPS Maha-Mandir, Robbinsville, NJ, USA

22 July 2012, Ahmedabad

The *murti-pratishtha* rituals for the *murtis* of the new BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir being built in Robbinsville, New Jersey, USA, was performed by His Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj in Ahmedabad on Sunday, 22 July 2012. Among the thousands of devotees who had gathered for this historic occasion at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Ahmedabad there were many who had travelled from the USA to participate in the Vedic ceremony.

At 5:30 p.m. learned pandits began singing the Vedic mantras while Pujya Mahant Swami, Pujya Tyagvallabh Swami, Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami, Pujya Viveksagar Swami and devotees offered *mahapuja* to Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and the *murtis* for the new mandir. After the *mahapuja* rituals, the history and updates of the mandir construction were shown on the large screens in the assembly hall.

Pujya Yagnavallabh Swami spoke about Swamishri's inspiration and the bhakti of the devotees in North America in their efforts towards building the mandir. Pujya Ishwarcharan Swami

spoke about the devotion and harmony amongst devotees from Bhagwan Swaminarayan's time in building mandirs for fostering *upasana*.

Pramukh Swami Maharaj arrived on stage at 6:30 p.m., led by a procession of young children dressed as devas and senior devotees of America. Then, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of Shri Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj. The senior sadhus performed the rituals for the other *murtis*: Shri Ghanshyam Maharaj, Shri Nilkanth Varni Maharaj, Shri Radha-Krishna Dev, Shri Sita-Ram Dev, Shri Lakshmanji and Shri Hanumanji, Shri Shiv-Parvati Dev with Shri Karthikeya and Shri Ganapatiji, and the Guru Parampara – Brahmaswarup Bhagatji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj, Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj and Pragat Brahmaswarup Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Thereafter, Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha arti* of the *murtis*, while the sadhus and devotees in the audience also performed the *arti*. Afterwards, Swamishri offered *mantra-pushpanjali* as the pandits recited the concluding shlokas of the ceremony.



After the completion of the *murti-pratishtha* rituals, youths of Ahmedabad Yuvak Mandal performed a lively traditional dance celebrating Bhagwan Swaminarayan's and Brahmaswarup Shastriji Maharaj's legacy of mandirs. Drawn by the tempo of the dance and the special occasion many devotees from the audience joyfully joined in the dance. Swamishri also participated by ringing a large bell and waving the BAPS flag.

Thereafter, blessing the assembly and those watching the live webcast, Swamishri spoke about how Yogiji Maharaj often talked about building mandirs on different continents, and credited the establishment of mandirs in Africa, USA and other places to Yogiji Maharaj's vision, prayers and grace. He lauded the efforts of all the devotees who had served by offering their prayers, talents and time in the building of the BAPS mandir in Robbinsville.

Then, senior sadhus honoured Swamishri by presenting garlands and shawls prepared by devotees from centres throughout America. Swamishri also sanctified rice grains that were hand-peeled by the women devotees and blessed their chits pledging the observance of various *niyams*.

The devotees present in the assembly and those who witnessed the live webcast felt honoured and happy to have witnessed such an historic occasion in Swamishri's presence.



Senior sadhus perform the pre-*pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the Maha-Mandir



Swamishri performs the *pratishtha* rituals

Senior sadhus and devotees from USA perform the pre-*pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the Maha-Mandir on the assembly stage of BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, Ahmedabad





Excerpts from a lecture by Sadhu Brahmaviharidas delivered on 1 July 2009 to MBA students and faculty members at the Indian Institute of Management, Indore, during the national IIM conference on 'The Journey of Excellence'; also published in the annual IIM Journal.

In this age of growing confrontation and competition, every nation, corporation and person is aiming for excellence. It is important to understand that excellence can be attained, but it cannot be sustained without spirituality.

Excellence is both attained and sustained through inner spiritual values. In fact, only spirituality can breathe purity and integrity into excellence and bring the necessary stability and strength. In a world regularly shaken by stories

of economic collapse, national corruption and social confusion, spirituality can no longer be a footnote; it has to be the foundation of life that provides long term joy, happiness and satisfaction. It is so easy to smile for a while; try laughing for a day. It is so easy to be happy for a day; try being happy for life. It is so difficult. Some of the easiest things that you know become the most difficult things to do, if you lack a proper perspective of values in life.

NIGHTMARE OF EXCELLENCE WITHOUT ETHICS

Without ethics and values, excellence alone could turn the best of us into the worst of us. Perhaps, the most extreme example of this is the 9/11 terrorist attack. Effectively analyzed, it would be excellence in execution; everything synchronized, timed, planned! Imagine, without an army, without a weapon, without war expenses, using American planes, burning American fuel, killing American citizens. The terrorists did what two world wars could not do to America. Technically analyzed from the viewpoint of pure statistics and systems, it was perhaps an unparalleled act of excellence in execution. But without ethics, it turned out to be a horror of humanity, a terrible crime against mankind. Excellence alone may sometimes lead to inhumanity, and mankind's nightmare.

Human history testifies that even education without ethics is disastrous. During World War II Hitler's concentration camps, that systematically exterminated over 6 million Jews, were built by professional engineers and skilled scientists, and run by trained doctors and nurses. One survivor has painfully written, *"I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes have seen what no man should witness. Gas chambers built by expert engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians, infants killed by trained nurses, women and babies shot and burnt by high school and college graduates. So I am suspicious of education. My request is help your students to become more human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths and educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic (management) are important only if they serve to make us more human."*

No wonder then that guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj often says, "Education without ethics destroys, and education with ethics protects." Hence, the world of excellence should be formed on the foundations of ethics and spirituality.

Only then can one achieve more in life, beyond oneself. Remember, when you graduate as managers, companies and corporations will be waiting to employ you. Hundreds of people will be working under you. You will not have to beg for success, you are IIM grads. But don't just be satisfied with a successful career. Being good alone is not good enough; be good for something or someone. Unless you serve, you don't deserve. We need to relook at the world we live in, reassess our measurement of success and revise our definition of excellence. When we change our outlook, we change the way the world looks.

POOR MAN'S RICH BOY

Perhaps this story of a poor man's rich boy might help us see a new world. There was a very rich man with an only son. He owned a massive mansion, a huge swimming pool, a rare dog, 10 acres of beautiful gardens, and a tall wall protecting his property. One day he said to his son, "Today I want to show you how poor the poor are." He took him to the slums on the banks of the river where people slept in the open and worked on the farms. On returning home, the father emphasized, "Son, now you know how poor the poor are." The son replied, "Yes dad, I saw that we have one dog and they have a hundred. I also saw that our swimming pool is just one acre, they have a mighty river that reaches the horizon. I saw that they grow their own food and we buy our food. Dad, I saw we have a chandelier to light our night, they have a million stars to light theirs. Dad, we need a huge wall to protect ourselves, they have each another to protect themselves. So thank you very much Dad, for showing me how poor we really are!"

The issue here is not of rich or poor, but that of changing one's perspective of life. It is not whether one is big or small; it is about experiencing joy, contentment and satisfaction.

Sometimes the real things that give us joy or happiness are free of charge. With all our wealth, we can hire the best room in the best hotel, but the sleep we get is free of charge. Similarly, money can buy good food but not digestion; money can buy people, but not friends. We may wriggle our way into becoming the director of some big company, but the respect we earn is free of charge. Due to your position, people may project you, but they won't respect you. Respect is not what you can get; it is something that you can give. And only if people choose to give you respect, you get it.

All these – respect, satisfaction, happiness – are a part of an inner world of values. We must first honestly accept that this inner world exists. But who cares? I am rich and successful, so why worry about my inner self? Nobody really knows if I am happy or unhappy. Please don't fool yourselves. Everybody realizes if you are unhappy. You can't hide it, just the way you can't hide an itch or a sneeze. Similarly, you won't be able to hide unhappiness; you can only try to mask it. And even if no one else knows, you know it hurts if you are not at peace with yourself. But because we are too pre-occupied by the visible, outer world, we ignore the invisible, inner world.

THINGS INVISIBLE INFLUENCE THINGS VISIBLE

It is important to know that when we understand our inner self, we naturally become better, brighter, stronger and happier. Sometimes, things invisible are more important than things visible. We behold buildings, but not the foundations that uphold them; we see life and creation, but not the Creator who created it. Even science is based on concepts, which are invisible. Who has seen zero degree Kelvin? Even Lord Kelvin who invented the thermodynamic temperature scale in 1848 never saw nor reached absolute zero. Have Volta, Ampere, Faraday, Edison or Tesla, the scientists

who discovered, studied and experimented with electricity seen electricity? What is mathematics? It is pure numbers. But what are numbers? Have you seen them? Can anyone see 1, 2 or 3? Who has seen plus or minus? Because of these invisible concepts and calculations, buildings stand, bridges remain stable and rockets fly. Just as faith in these invisible concepts has brought remarkable changes to the things that we can see, faith in the invisible world of values, ethics, emotions and spirituality will shape the life you see around you.

The inner world is more important than your outer world. Those people who have attained success, but have ignored this inner world have ultimately succumbed and suffered. You may seem to succeed, but only temporarily.

A MATCH KING WITHOUT A MATCH BOX

If success or excellence is attained at the cost of values and ethics, it boomerangs and self-destructs. Those who cheat their way up, meet defeat half way down. Ivar Kreuger, a Swedish engineer, financier, entrepreneur and industrialist, who was hailed as one of the wealthiest, and most successful businessmen of his time, saw his past ruin his future. He finished his graduation three years in advance. As a leading engineer, he started his own construction company in 1908. With a monopoly, owning 75% of the worldwide matchstick industry, his wealth grew to 32 billion dollars. He alone bailed out nations like Poland, Hungary, Germany and France from their financial crises with loans of over 250 million dollars. But tragically he ended up shooting himself in France, the country that called him 'The Saviour of the Nation'. He was involved in many frauds and embezzlements. His childhood friends declared that he was a sneak and a cheat as a student. On his first trip to the USA, he hired the entire telegraphic system of the ship for 7 days to

create an illusion of being excessively busy. Without wiring a single message, he concocted a hype of being the busiest man alive. On his arrival, when hundreds of reporters crowded to interview him, and in an act of skilful manipulation, he put a cigar in his mouth and deliberately searched his pockets for a match box, then smilingly declared he had no match box. Next morning, he hogged the headlines 'A match king without a match box'. He chose to become popular by manipulation, wealthy by fraud, successful by swindling. It did bring fame and name, but ultimately he lost the game of life, and dwindled to his downfall. His fabricated past caught up and compelled him to commit suicide in Paris.

DON'T RUIN YOUR REWARD

Interestingly, as managers you run the biggest risk so far as manipulation is concerned. Primarily because you will have to manage products and people, markets and minds. You will shape perceptions, access apprehensions and mould emotions. The need for ethics, pure and profound, cannot be more emphasized in your field. Be honest. You will be rewarded with high powerful positions; but, with great power, comes great responsibility. You'll need to be more aware, more ethical and more spiritual. If one's heart is not pure from within, one suffers even in success.

An ancient spiritual folklore amply explains this. Once a devotee of Lord Shiva performed *tapas* and pleased Lord Shiva, who granted him three wishes, on one condition: whatever he asked for, his neighbour would get double. So, after great thought, the devotee, who was rife with jealousy, asked God to take away his one eye, one arm and one leg. Subsequently, his neighbour lost both eyes, both arms and both legs. His jealousy ruined the reward of his *tapas*.

This is where spirituality comes to the rescue. True spirituality helps one purify oneself, realize

oneself. When one truly masters oneself, one masters the world.

MAP AND THE MAN

First, focus on the self. When you put yourself in order, there will be order everywhere. Swami Chinmayanandji often gave a classic example of a father and a hyperactive son who kept pestering him with questions. To keep the kid occupied, he tore out a map of the world from a magazine, cut into many pieces, then gave it to his son, saying, "Now fix it back together". He knew it would be very difficult, near impossible for the boy to piece the puzzle and he would be able to have some peace and quiet. But to his surprise, within ten minutes the boy returned victorious. He had fixed the entire map of the world. The father exclaimed, "Oh my God, how did you do it?" "Dad, it was so easy. On the other side of the map there was a picture of a man. All I did was put the man together and the world came together on its own.

Take care of your micro world, and create a macro world around you. Only you alone can enter your inner world of emotions and values; you alone have the power to act upon it; no one else can do it for you. Bhagwan Swaminarayan declares, "When has one attempted to see his own self and failed to see it?... All deficiencies which remain are due to one's own lethargy." He also says that one who "looks at objects externally, but does not look at one's own self is the most ignorant of the ignorant, the most senseless of the senseless, the most foolish of fools and the vilest of the vile." So, in spite of you being excellently educated and incredibly successful, if you lack the spiritual dimension, what you have attained will not be sustained.

THE SIXTH SENSE

In his search for sustainable progress, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, India's most popular and

visionary president, has dedicated eight pages (73-80) in his book, *Ignited Minds*, describing his meeting with Pramukh Swami Maharaj. He writes, “My discussion with Swamiji on the fusion of science and spirituality, and the role it can play on national development, went on for an hour.” When Dr Kalam informed that 500 top scientists and thinkers of India had identified five important areas – education and healthcare, agriculture, information and communication, infrastructure and critical technology – to transform India by 2020, Swamiji suggested, “Add a sixth one – faith in God and developing people through spirituality. This is very important. First we need to generate a moral and spiritual atmosphere... to change today’s climate of crime and corruption. We need people who live by the laws of the scriptures and bear faith in God... only then we shall be able to achieve what we dream.” Swamiji emphasized spirituality as the foundation of real sustainable progress.

How spirituality positively influences a scientist’s life is evident in Dr Kalam’s own life. Once, a sadhu asked him, “Why you are so energetic and full of enthusiasm at this age?” He replied, “I have learnt it from your guru, Pramukh Swami Maharaj. I always ask myself what can I give? What can I give to make others happy? Pramukh Swami Maharaj, all his life, has believed and lived: what can I give to little children, the youths, the aged, to everything and everyone in this world to make it a happier place? To bring a smile to the face of this world!” Remember, many think that we gain by ‘getting’ but we really grow by ‘giving’. Be a go-giver, not a go-getter.

Lord Buddha gave up everything and gained more than everything. He has become more renowned, more influential than all the emperors put together. When Buddha was asked to give one word that could save mankind, he pointed to a deep spiritual value. He said, “Compassion”;

Confucius said, “Cooperation”; Bhagwan Swaminarayan said, “Bhakti”; Bhagwan Ram replied, “Righteousness”; and Bhagwan Krishna said, “Faith”. All these values create our inner spiritual world.

SUSTAINABLE EXISTENCE

This inner world forms the software that controls our outer hardware. To remain pure and strong from the inside Gandhiji often said, “Without prayer, I would have been a lunatic long ago.” Faith in God is our life-support system. We may not understand how it works, but it does. Newton once created a model of our solar system, which moved with perfect motion and proportion. All his students were flabbergasted and asked him who created it. Newton said, “Nobody.” The students didn’t believe him. He then explained that for this purely mechanical model if you insist that there has to be a creator – which is me – then how can you say there is no Creator behind this wonderful cosmos that moves in perfect harmony and synchrony? Unshakeable belief in God and the guru, in our family and friends, in mankind and ourselves is the bedrock of sustainable existence.

Lastly, remember the world is waiting for you. Go out and become the best professionals, but also the finest of human beings. Do not compete with your environment; complete it. Do not fly too high that you lose focus on the family that raised you. Do not become too busy for the friends who found you. Do not become too wise before your teachers who taught you. Do not become too proud to help people around you. Finally, do not become too big to forget God who protects you. For, it is this inner world of values, ethics and spirituality that will truly shape, support and sustain you. ♦

Narada

The Voice of Bhakti



Imagine a Puranic personage straddling infinite periods of Hindu mythology, travelling through the universe in a matter of minutes. His mission: to do good to others by spreading devotion to Narayan (Vishnu, Hari or Krishna) and seeking nothing for himself. That is Maharshi Narada, the mind-born son of Brahma. Narada, one of the ten Prajapatis, presides over vast expanses of space and time. Narada's presence is recorded in the Treta and Dvapara *yugas*. (There are other Naradas in other ages but they are distinct from this Narada.) He was conscious of the problems Kali Age would pose to ordinary mortals.

Narada plays a very important role in the Puranas as an upholder of dharma and a destroyer of *adharma*. Earlier in our history Narada appears as a composer of hymns in the Rig Veda. In the Upanishadic Age Narada went to Sanatkumara for instruction and was asked to first reveal what he had already learnt. He listed 18 *vidyas* among his accomplishments. Despite his vast learning the sage felt his knowledge about *atma* was not sufficient and hence the need for instruction. Thus Narada, as we know him, is first mentioned in the Chandogya Upanishad which forms part of the Atharva Veda.

Narada has inspired sages like Valmiki and Vyasa

to greater efforts in spreading dharma and propagating bhakti through their literary compositions: Ramayana and Mahabharata.

GYASA’S TRIBUTE

In the Adiparva of the Mahabharata, Vyasa pays the following tribute to Narada, “Narada is a great scholar, learned in Vedanta, serene and tender-hearted. He is respected by human beings, angels and demons alike. He has a luminous personality and is a veritable Brihaspati in intellectual powers. He has extraordinary proficiency in the Sama Veda and is an expert musician. He can clear any doubts and misgivings. He always finds ways and means of helping people out of difficulties on the spur of the moment. He is endowed with pleasant speech. He knows the precise use of each word.”

Some rishis are called Brahma Manasputras (born from the mind of Lord Brahma); Narada is one of them. After willing them into existence, Pitamaha Brahma instructed them to get married and raise progeny. All except Narada did so. Thus, Brahma became angry at his son’s defiance and cursed him to continual wandering throughout the three worlds and fourteen *lokas* (realms) as a mendicant.

Brahma was not the only one to curse Narada. Daksha Prajapati, son of Prachetas, was angry with Narada for persuading his 11,000 sons not to marry. Daksha Prajapati first produced 10,000 sons to populate the world, but Narada convinced them to renounce the world. So, Daksha Prajapati produced 1,000 more sons, and again Narada persuaded them to renounce. Enraged, Daksha cursed Narada to suffer birth in Mrutyuloka. As a result Narada was born among men, to a servant maid. The story of this Narada is narrated in the Bhagavat Purana.

NOT A TROUBLEMAKER

Sometimes it appears as if the rishi deliberately instigated people against each other

to cause trouble. However, he merely intended to bring about the downfall of the wicked and protect the virtuous.

Take for instance the downfall of Kansa. It was Narada who prompted the tyrant to kill all the infants born of Devaki. This was done only to rouse the anger of brothers, Krishna and Balarama, and turn the people of Mathura against him.

SERVICE IN ASHRAM

As a young boy, Narada served the holy rishis who came to stay at the ashrama during the rainy season. The young Narada served them diligently and would eat their leftovers. This purified his mind. When the rishis left, he felt very sad. But they taught him how to focus his mind on the Divine. Meanwhile Narada’s mother, who was greatly attached to him, died of a snakebite. Narada was only five at the time, but he considered it as the snapping of worldly ties. Following a voice from the sky Narada proceeded northwards to meditate. Bhagwan gave the young devotee darshan. When he tries once again to recall the *murti*, Narayana tells him that he would not attain God with the present body, but that he should keep on chanting his name. Narada, therefore, shed his body, entered Hari’s mouth and attained a new life as the mind-born son of Pitamaha Brahma. It is in this existence that he spread devotion to God by constantly taking his name.

Narada realized that Vyasa had compiled the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, epics and many other shastras – to help people in the future. But still, Vyasa Muni did not feel fully at peace within. Once Narada saw Vyasa sitting in a melancholy mood in his ashram on the banks of the Saraswati. Narada questioned him, “Why are you looking so sad?” “After all that I had done I feel I have not done enough,” was Vyasa’s reply. “Yes, you have not done enough,”

echoed Narada. Surprised, Vyasa rattled off his formidable list of texts.

“All that is true, but you have not done enough to spread Bhakti Yoga which is easy for ordinary people to follow.” And that was how the Bhagavat Purana, the last of the Puranas, came to be written. The Purana was first heard by Brahma from Narayana himself. Thereafter, he asked his mendicant son to spread the knowledge of Bhagwan’s incidents among people. Narada saw Vyasa sitting in a pensive, despondent mood and advised him to write a scripture on Bhagwan Krishna’s life to lift him out of his downcast state.

STORY OF PRAHLAD

Narada features frequently in the Bhagavat. Hiranyakashipu was a demonic king, whose queen, Kayadhu, was pregnant. To prevent the evil lineage from continuing Indra planned to kill the unborn infant. However, Narada reassured Indra that the unborn child would be a great devotee of God and would not pose any threat to his position.

So, Narada sheltered Kayadhu in his ashrama during the gestation period and discoursed to her about devotion to God. The unborn child, Prahlada, heard all these talks and developed into a great devotee of Narayana.

AJAMILA THE SINNER

Ajamila was a notorious sinner. On the advice of Narada, he named his youngest son Narayana. In this way he took the name of God and so Ajamila was redeemed. Thus, Narada helped to popularize devotion to God among people of all backgrounds.

To further spread devotion to God, Narada wrote the *Narada Bhaktisutras* in a simple language.

An important message that Narada conveys through his *sutras* is that devotees, while caring for their body, should not pander to the senses.

They should study the shastras as this forms part of *navadha* bhakti. Narada also emphasizes that company of the wicked should be avoided and that of noble souls should be preferred. *Maya* is an obstacle on the path of bhakti and Bhagwan alone can help in overcoming it. Ultimately, by offering devotion in the form of prayer to God devotees attain God-realization. Narada also teaches that devotees must carry out their duties as guided by the shastras, but should leave the reward in Bhagwan’s hands.

Thus, Narada is a treasure trove of knowledge, which he had learnt from Mahadeva (Shiva) himself.

He also wrote *Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad*, *Narada Smriti*, *Naradiya Siksha*, and *Narada Pancharatra*. *Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad* is a text that is considered to be a minor *Upanishad* and forms a part of the *Atharva Veda*. It deals with monastic life.

EVER HELPFUL

We find that it is quite often that the devas themselves enlisted the help of Narada Muni in their work. Once, Brahma asked him to somehow or other bring Narayana to earth so that the harassed people during the Kaliyuga might get some direct help. On reaching the banks of the Ganga Narada saw the sages making arrangements to perform a *yagna*. Narada innocently asked them as to which deva among Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesha would be getting the fruits of the *yagna* and so grant them *moksha*? The assembled sages were naturally taken aback by the question and each rishi began to scratch his head. They found the question difficult to answer. Narada asked, “What is the use of a *yagna* if you do not know which deity is going to get the fruits of your *yagna*?” Narada advised the rishis to choose someone who could find the most suitable recipient of the fruits of *yagna* among the devas. Now the question arose as to who

(Contd. on pg. 31)

Highway to Happiness

Swamishri addressed the evening public assembly held at the Hindu Union Shivalaya Mandir in Mombasa, Kenya, on 10 September 1999. He spoke about the important role of mandirs in our life and that lasting happiness is attained only by taking the refuge of God and practicing dharma...



This mandir will help to strengthen one's practice of dharma. It is for us all. The more we do the more we will benefit. Everyone should come here and make the most of this opportunity. It will lead us towards the liberation of our soul and will bring us peace.

We engage in worldly activities, but it is also necessary that we come for God's darshan, listen to spiritual discourses and associate with pious sadhus. In life, these are the things which give us inner peace.

Tulsidas was a great devotee. He wrote the Ramayan, in which he says that by engaging in satsang, our worldly attachments are dissolved. Today, due to these worldly attachments, people run around to accumulate wealth and acquire external conveniences. But these will not give inner peace. Peace resides in the darshan of God, listening to discourses about God and keeping the company of holy sadhus.

Tulsidas says, “*Surpur, Narpur, Nāgpur, e tinme sukh nāhi; kā sukh Hari ke charan me kā santan ke māhi.*” – “There is no happiness in the heavens, on earth or in the nether regions; bliss lies only at the feet of God or his holy Sadhu.”

Having attained this opportunity, we should understand that the root source of what we wish to attain is God, Paramatma. He is the source of peace and joy. If we live by our ancient values, then we will experience peace and joy. There is no happiness in this perishable world. Tulsidas states this in the Ramayan.

Whatever one’s faith may be, one should live piously. Bhagwan Swaminarayan taught that by living with piety and remaining free of all addictions everyone would experience bliss in life. The virtues of piety, honesty, compassion, ahimsa, *brahmacharya*, righteousness, *jnan*, detachment, bhakti and others are the basis of Hindu Dharma.

This mandir, if it is properly maintained, will protect us from heat, rain and cold. But without maintenance it will deteriorate. Similarly, if you use your wealth appropriately it will protect you in times of need. However, if it is wasted on addictions and other immoral habits then it will not be of use in times of need.

God has said that if we offer devotion to him, he will protect us. By cultivating the virtues he has described we will experience peace and bliss in society, God will be pleased and we will attain *moksha*.

Before God, we all must shed our ego and seek his refuge. Only then is everything achieved. If we overcome our worldly desires, worship him and take firm refuge in him then he will protect us.

Gunatitanand Swami was a great *paramhansa* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan, who stayed for 40 years in the mandir at Junagadh. Over 300 sadhus lived under his guidance. He led countless devotees to understand the glory of God, experience inner peace and secure

moksha. He also transformed the lives of many unscrupulous people, inspiring them to lead a God-centred life.

Gunatitanand Swami has said, “*Jetlu kāi māyāmā sukh chhe te dukh vinānu hoy nahi.*” – “All the joys of this world always contain misery.” None of the worldly pleasures will bring happiness to the *jiva*. Wealth and other worldly objects may give the body joy, but the *atma* experiences happiness in a different way.

If happiness lies in wealth, then it should give us peace. However, some people with much wealth commit suicide. They need to take pills to sleep. Money will buy big mansions, but only God can grant sleep. God has given us this human body and, as householders, you all have social obligations. You earn money to buy homes and other things, but remember that the foundation of all happiness is Paramatma. If you forsake his refuge, then you will not find happiness in this perishable world. That is why Gunatitanand Swami has said that all apparent happiness in this world is never without misery.

In the Shrimad Bhagavat there is a story of the troubles caused by the *syamantak mani* (a special type of gem which daily gave gold to its owner). It brought misery to Satrajit, the original recipient, his brother and others. Whoever possessed it encountered trouble. Also, Shri Krishna was falsely accused of having stolen it. So, even in the household of Shri Krishna, who was an incarnation of God, the presence of the jewel led to disputes and disharmony. God is free of all attachments, but such incidents demonstrate that these things cause misery. So, earn enough to meet your needs, but do not chase blindly after wealth at the cost of everything else in life. God is eternal and the source of all happiness. Thus, if we offer devotion to him he will protect us.

Bhagwan Swaminarayan has given a very beautiful definition of dharma: “*Dharma*

gneyo sadāchār.” – “Know dharma to be good character.”

We all belong to the Vedic Sanatan Hindu Dharma. We should strengthen this belief and faith, and offer devotion to God. It is important that we live by the principles and traditions of our dharma. It is not enough merely to talk about it.

Some people come to the mandir for darshan and to listen to discourses, but they also indulge in partying, gambling, drinking and other such inappropriate activities. That is not dharma. It is hypocrisy. That is why Bhagwan Swaminarayan taught that dharma means good character. By practising dharma, *moksha* is secured. So, develop good character, cultivate the virtues of dharma, *jnan*, *vairagya* and *bhakti* and lead an addiction-free life.

You are all intelligent and know that addictions are not necessary. To sustain the body only air, water and a vegetarian diet are required. Generally, when people’s wealth increases, they indulge in inappropriate eating, drinking and entertainment. People do not follow dharma and then complain about the misery they encounter. But if one’s character and life are pure then everything will be fine. Thus, God is truth, the mandirs are truth and the shastras are true. So, by accepting and living by their principles happiness and peace is experienced. Also, by coming regularly to the mandir, listening to discourses and practising satsang these principles are strengthened in our lives.

Through the company of God’s holy Sadhu, who himself sincerely observes dharma, our ignorance is dissolved, unrighteousness is removed and worldly attachment is eliminated. He instills us with spiritual virtues, destroys our false understanding of reality and anchors us to God.

Gunatitanand Swami has stated that to remain happy, think of those who are worse off

than you. People invite misery by bemoaning what they do not have, instead of being satisfied with and enjoying what they do have.

It is said,

*“Rājābhi dukhiyā, rankbhi dukhiyā
Dhanpati dukhit vicār me,
Vinā vivek bhekh sab dukhiyā,
Sant sukhi sansārme.”*

“Even kings are unhappy, the poor are unhappy and the wealthy are also unhappy;

Without understanding all renunciant’s are also unhappy; in this world only the holy Sadhu is happy.”

So, only those who desire nothing are truly happy. Otherwise, even powerful kings, rulers and the wealthy have faced misery by fighting and quarrelling over wealth and land. However, those who develop true spiritual wisdom experience lasting joy. This wisdom is that of *atma* and Paramatma: ‘I am *atma* and it is my duty to worship Paramatma. I am not this perishable body.’

Through God’s holy Sadhu, who has no attachment to his body or world, our body-centredness is overcome and the realization of our *atma* is achieved. Shriji Maharaj revealed Gunatitanand Swami as such a holy Sadhu. After him Bhagatji Maharaj, Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj manifested on this earth. By the association of such sadhus, true spiritual knowledge is acquired and happiness is experienced.

May God grant everyone the strength to lead such principled lives that all experience true happiness and that peace and joy spread throughout society and the world. ♦

Experience of Swaminarayan Akshardham, Delhi

Shri Vamadeva Shastri (Dr David Frawley, Vedacharya), visited Akshardham on 27 March 2012 and later wrote about his experience

It could be said that the true condition of a country can be measured by the nature, magnitude and beauty of its places of worship.

If this is the case, there is much hope for the future of India. The Swaminarayan Akshardham in Delhi is a national monument of such spiritual depth, beauty, grandeur and profundity that it casts a vast light for the entire world. Akshardham radiates a message of peace, understanding and devotion far beyond the boundaries on which it is located, bringing a spiritual energy to the otherwise turbulent capital of modern India.

A great temple is not simply a congregational hall for a particular religious community to gather in or to conduct its services. It is a doorway to the heavenly worlds and the realms of celestial light. In the case of Akshardham, the temple reflects the highest abode of Swaminarayan, the supreme consciousness behind the universe, where blessings descend to all the manifest worlds. The many thousands of pilgrims and visitors that come to Akshardham on a daily basis are bathed in its celestial influences, awakening their deeper aspirations in life.

When one walks into this great temple, one is ascending the ladder of the worlds and has the opportunity to transcend time and space, sorrow and death, shedding one's outer personality for one's deeper soul and spirit that is one with the Divine.

The vast temple includes all the main great gurus and *devtas* of the Sanatana Dharma portrayed in a magnificent display of natural stone sculpture. One gets a sense of the spiritual glory that has been India's heritage through the

centuries and its endurance for all time.

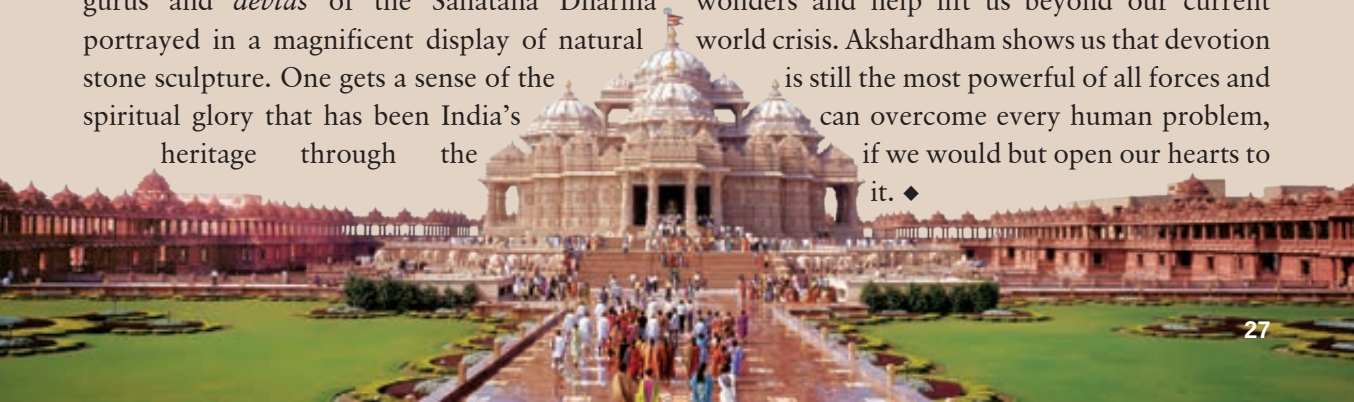
The temple complex is also a great learning experience, teaching the meaning and value of dharma through its many unique displays of the history of India and its spiritual teachings. The traditional role of the Hindu temple as an educational centre is perhaps nowhere better represented in the country.

Akshardham reflects an artistic vision of the highest value, with its astounding architectural design and magnificent sculptures and gardens in their great variety. Walking through the temple clears away all stress and agitation from the mind, bringing in gentle *sattvic* vibrations that can uplift the soul and heal the mind and heart. Many personal problems can be solved by simply visiting Akshardham and being receptive to its energies. The solutions will descend from within as a flow of grace.

I have visited Akshardham a number of times starting in 2005, when I first saw the complex before the construction was finished. Each new visit unfolds new wonders and new life-changing experiences.

The hospitality of the Swamis and the temple staff is always overwhelming. Nothing is done out of mere obligation or as a mere job, everyone moves with grace, a sense of joy and great courtesy.

More of the spirit of Akshardham needs to enter India and the entire world. It would work wonders and help lift us beyond our current world crisis. Akshardham shows us that devotion is still the most powerful of all forces and can overcome every human problem, if we would but open our hearts to it. ♦



ROLE OF SATSANG

I have not had the fortune to be born into Satsang, nor have I had the privilege of being in Satsang for many years either, but I have been lucky in attaining Satsang in this life. Having not started my life as a *satsangi*, it is easier for me to see the effects Satsang has had on my life, and where I probably would have ended up had it not been for Satsang. When my family and I joined Satsang, the whole ideology was too large to grasp at once. There were too many new ideas, rules, thought processes which needed to be grasped, and it was somewhat overwhelming. Despite this there was one overriding factor which helped us overcome all difficulties – Pramukh Swami Maharaj (Bapa). Bapa personified hope, trust, friendship, love – the list is endless. We sometimes do not realize what he has done for us, until we take the time to look.

I was fortunate enough to be a participant on the Bal Mandal India Trip in 2006, which, in a nutshell, changed my life. It was the first time I had been able to experience Bapa's bliss and divinity on a personal level. Whether it would be how he casually guided us, or even how he would take the time out to play with young *balaks* like ourselves, he always made time for us, even if he didn't have it. You may be wondering, why am I am repeating about Bapa with reference to my past experiences. But for me Satsang is summed up by one person – Bapa. Once you begin to grasp what Bapa does for you, your whole outlook on life changes. You then begin to want to reciprocate and start to endeavour to repay him.

I began to do this by trying to find ways to please Bapa. It started with small things. Sometimes we forget that Bapa can see everything we do. It's like the story of a guru and his four disciples: the guru gives each disciple an apple and tells them to eat the apple where no one can see them. One goes round the corner and eats the apple, the second goes deep into the forest and eats

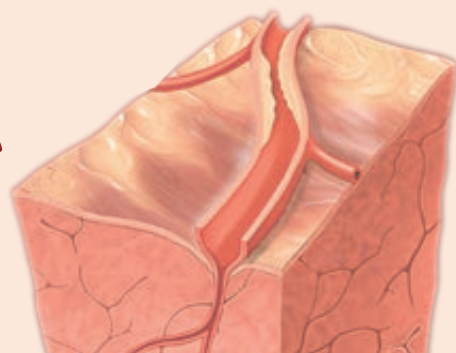
the apple, the third locks himself in the toilet and eats the apple, and the fourth comes back crying. When the guru asks why he is crying, the disciple explains that no matter where he goes, God is always watching. Using this story, I began to realize that it wasn't only the big issues, like, daily puja, *arti*, *thal*, *ghar sabha*, etc., which made a difference, but it was also the times in between when there was no one around to judge you. This played a big role in my school and university life. If I was in a class, and not paying attention, I would often find myself thinking, "If Bapa was here right now, would he be pleased?" With this thought, I would have no choice but to concentrate. This one thought, coupled with the thought of how I was ever going to repay Bapa, would often be the deciding factor in choosing the right path. Whether it be in overcoming laziness, or wearing a *tilak-chandlo* in public, things that seemed impossible now became possible. Satsang moulded me, changed me, created the new me.

There's one term which gets banded about quite a lot, but it's a term which many people, myself included, don't fully comprehend – unconditional love. Just take a moment and think about that – Bapa loves us unconditionally. Think about the amount of times we have chosen the force of *maya* over Bapa, or chosen to indulge instead of refrain. How many times have we done what we want rather than what Bapa wants? Yet has Bapa ever held that against us? He loves us and continues to love us despite our faults and mistakes. This is what changed me the most. Once you realize this, you begin to want to live for Bapa. Every *niyam* doesn't become a chore, but it becomes a pleasure. To lose someone who loves you this much would be bordering on insanity, and the only way you can lose Bapa is if you push him away. He will never let go of your hand or give up on you. Therefore it is up to you to make sure you never let go of him. Trust him, serve him, love him. ♦

High Blood Pressure

Blood Pressure and Cholesterol

Part 1



WHAT IS HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE?

High blood pressure, also called ‘hypertension’ is when the pressure of blood flowing through arteries is raised. About three in every 10 people in the UK will have hypertension and over the age of 65 years, this increases to about two in every three people.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

There is no single definite cause of hypertension, but it is known that when blood arteries become less elastic, more rigid and narrowed, blood pressure increases. This can be affected by a number of things including:

- Not doing enough physical activity
- Being overweight
- Having too much salt in your diet
- Not eating enough fruits and vegetables
- Age.

If there is a family history of hypertension, it may mean a greater chance of having the condition, and it is much more common in people of Indian origin in the UK. In a few people there may be another rarer cause due to conditions of the kidney, adrenal gland or a side-effect of certain medicines.

DO YOU HAVE HYPERTENSION?

Over half the people with hypertension are not being treated and about a third of

these don’t even realize that they have it. This is because many people will not have any symptoms at all. Only some people will get headaches, problems with vision, breathing and nosebleeds. Therefore, the only way to find out if your blood pressure is high is to have it measured.

MEASURING BLOOD PRESSURE

This can be done using a blood-pressure monitor; a cuff is wrapped around the upper arm and inflated and deflated. Blood pressure is measured in ‘mmHg’ and is given as a reading of two numbers. The systolic pressure is the highest pressure placed by the heart on the artery walls as it beats and the diastolic pressure is the lowest pressure the heart exerts on the blood vessel walls as it relaxes in between beats. Normal blood pressures should be below 140/85 mmHg. If you have diabetes, kidney, heart or circulation disease then it should be below 130/80 mmHg.

Some people feel nervous when getting their blood pressure measured and the reading may be higher than it usually is. In this case your doctor may take measurements on several occasions over a period of time or provide you with a monitor and ask you to record the measurements in a diary at home, before diagnosing you with hypertension.

If you are monitoring your blood pressure at home, it is important to ensure your blood pressure machine is reliable and you know how to use it properly. It is vital to use the correct size cuff when measuring your blood pressure and you must be rested for five minutes, sitting down and not talking for the measurement to be accurate.

PROBLEMS WITH HYPERTENSION

People who have hypertension for a long period of time have a lower life expectancy, and are more likely to have:

- Stroke
- Heart attack and heart failure
- Kidney failure
- Damage to the eyes.

HOW TO LOWER YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

There are many lifestyle changes you can make to lower your blood pressure. Some of them include:

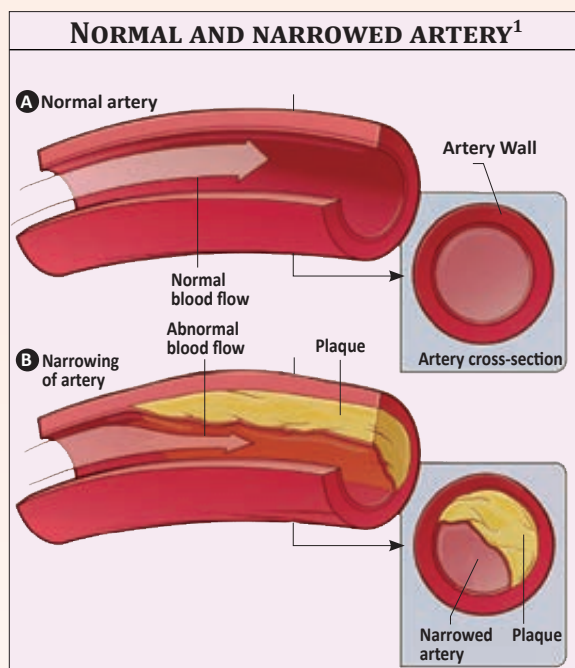
- Cutting down on salt in your diet
- Eating more fruit and vegetables
- Keeping active
- Losing weight.

After a few weeks or months of lifestyle changes and monitoring, if your blood pressure remains high your doctor will start one or more medicines; this will usually continue for a long-term. It may take some time for the medicines to work and sometimes it may be necessary to increase the dose, change, or add other medicines. Your doctor or nurse will regularly check your blood pressure to see if it is controlled.

HYPERLIPIDAEMIA

WHAT IS HYPERLIPIDAEMIA?

Lipids are the fatty substances in blood which include cholesterol and triglycerides. A raised level of these is called 'hyperlipidaemia'. Cholesterol is made in the body by the liver



from saturated fats in food, and is required for the body to function. However, there are two types of cholesterol: **LDL** which is a 'bad' type, and **HDL** which is a 'good' type because it removes the LDL cholesterol from the blood. Triglycerides are the other fatty substance, found in foods such as dairy products and cooking oils.

PROBLEMS WITH HIGH CHOLESTEROL

High levels of cholesterol (especially LDL) and triglycerides in the bloods lead to fatty material accumulating within the wall of arteries. When arteries supplying oxygen to the heart muscle are affected, this leads to angina (chest pain) and heart attacks. A similar process occurring within the arteries supplying the brain can lead to stroke.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE?

Hyperlipidaemia is mostly due to eating too much fat, especially saturated fat. In a very small number of people it may be due to thyroid

1. [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3A Atherosclerosis_diagram.gif](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3A%20Atherosclerosis_diagram.gif)

or kidney problems, and 1 in 500 people may have hyperlipidaemia because of an inherited condition.

HOW ARE LIPIDS MEASURED?

Blood cholesterol can be measured either by sending a blood sample to the laboratory, or a finger-prick test read by a portable machine. In order to check triglycerides, you will not be allowed to eat for 12 hours prior to the test.

Cholesterol and triglycerides are measured in 'mmol/l' (or 'mg/dl'). People who are overweight or have diabetes, high blood pressure, heart or circulation diseases, or have a family history of heart disease or strokes should aim for the following levels.

HOW TO IMPROVE LIPID LEVELS

- Eat healthily; reduce fat in your diet, especially avoiding saturated fat
- Be physically active

Ideal Lipid Levels for Those at Risk

Total cholesterol	Less than: 4 mmol/l (or 155 mg/dl)
- LDL cholesterol	Less than: 2 mmol/l (or 77 mg/dl)
- HDL cholesterol	More than: 1 mmol/l (or 39 mg/dl)
Triglyceride	Less than: 1.7 mmol/l (or 151 mg/dl)

- Take cholesterol lowering medicine if you have been prescribed them by your doctor.

CONCLUSION

Both hypertension and hyperlipidaemia are major risk factors for developing heart disease, so it is vital that these are controlled. In the next issue, we will go into more specific details of how you can improve your blood pressure and lipid levels and reduce your risk of developing heart disease. ♦

2. <http://www.bhf.org.uk/publications/view-publication.aspx?ps=1000139>

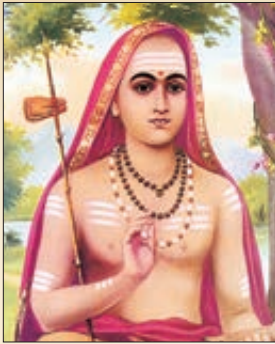
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would find that out. It was unanimously decided that Bhrigu Rishi should do the work. It was a very difficult thing to do as nothing could be hidden from the devas. But Bhrigu accepted the task entrusted to him. His first stop was Brahmaloaka and he took a seat without saluting Pitamaha Brahma. Brahma became angry at Bhrigu's lack of respect towards him. The rishi left, thinking that Brahma was not *sattvic* enough to receive the fruits of the *yagna*. Next, Bhrigu went to Kailash to meet Shiva. But Shiva was busy and despite his attendants asking Bhrigu not to go inside, Bhrigu barges in. Furious, Shiva throws him out of Kailash. So, Shiva also failed

the test. Now only Vishnu remained. After reaching Vaikuntha he approached Vishnu and kicked him in the chest. Instead of chastising the arrogant rishi, Vishnu enquires whether the kick had hurt his foot and massages it. A horrified Lakshmi was furious with her husband's conduct and demands to know why he was so concerned about the rishi's foot; in anger she left her husband. Vishnu is forced to come to earth in search of her. Bhrigu decided that among the three Vishnu was best suited to receive the fruits of *yagna*. That is Narada. Ever helpful! He had only to be approached for help. ♦

FAQs On Hinduism

From *Hinduism, An Introduction* by Sadhu Vivekchudamani and Consultant Editor Dr Janak Dave,
published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath



Adi Shankaracharya



Ramanujacharya

1. What is the relationship between *jiva*, *ishwara*, *maya* and God?

There are several doctrines regarding the relationship of God (Parabrahman) with *jiva* (soul), *ishwara* and *maya* (matter).

- i. Adi Shankaracharya believed in only one Reality, known as Brahman. He also believed that every *jiva* is basically identical with Brahman and the empirical world experience is *maya*, which is an illusion. He believed *maya* to be indescribable. His philosophy is summarized in the following verse, “*Brahma satyam jagan mithyā, Jivo brahmaiva nāpara-ha,*” meaning, “Brahman, the Absolute, alone is real; this world is unreal; and the *jiva* or the individual soul is not different from Brahman.”¹ His philosophy is known as the Kevala Advaita doctrine (Monism).
- ii. Ramanujacharya established the Vishishtadvaita School (Qualified non-dualism) which recognized the unity of *jiva* and *maya* with Parabrahman as his body (*sharira-shariri bhava*), but both *jiva* and *jagat* (material world) are also distinct and subordinate to him.
- iii. Nimbarkacharya propounded that *jiva* and *maya* are related to God like a part and

the whole. The *jiva* is a part of God but it does not lose its individuality, like a ray of the sun which is a part of the sun and yet distinct from it. His doctrine is known as Dvaitadvaita (Dualistic non-dualism).

- iv. Madhvacharya established the school of Dvaita (Pure or Unqualified Dualism) which says that God (Vishnu) is supreme. Both *jiva* and *maya* are different from God and from each other, yet subordinate and dependent upon him. He said *maya* or the material world is real.
- v. According to Vallabhacharya, God (Krishna), *jiva* and *maya* are all one. Therefore his doctrine is called Shuddhadvaita (Pure non-dualism). God or Brahman is the embodiment of *sat* (existence), *chit* (consciousness), *ananda* (bliss) and *rasa* (sentiment). He creates the world out of himself for ‘lila’ or sport. *Jiva* and *maya* are his manifestations like sparks that emerge from a big fire; and they are both real but not illusory.
- vi. Chaitanya Mahaprabhu’s philosophy is known as Achintya-Bhedabheda (Inconceivable identity-in-difference). He believed that Parabrahman (Krishna) has form (*sakara*) and is possessed with three principal powers: (1) *swarupa shakti*, (2) *maya shakti* and (3) *jiva shakti*. The *swarupa shakti* is God’s internal power, the *maya shakti* is God’s external power, responsible for creation of the material universe, and the *jiva shakti* of God forms the essence of *jivas*. He believes the world to be real and not an illusion. The *jiva* is a conscious power of God. It is related to God like sparks in a fire or as parts of a whole.
- vii. Bhagwan Swaminarayan’s philosophy

1. Vivekchudamani 20.

is known as Swaminarayan Vedant Darshana. He believed in the doctrine of five eternal realities, viz. *jiva*, *ishwar*, *maya*, Brahman and Parabrahman. The first two are bound by *maya* and the latter two are eternally untouched by *maya*. For the *jivas* to secure *moksha* they need to attain the state of *brahmarup* by profoundly

associating with Brahman (the God-realized Sadhu). He believed that God has a personal form (*sakar*) and that the *jivas* remain separate and subservient to God even when they attain *moksha*. Bhagwan Swaminarayan declared that he would remain ever-present on earth through his Gunatit Sadhu in human form for the liberation of countless souls.

Each of the *acharyas* and others interpreted the relationships between three basic *tattvas*, namely, *jivas* or individual souls, *jagat* or non-sentient world and Ishwara or Paramatma according to their own understanding and interpretation. They also stated ways to realize God. Besides them there are other interpretations.

2. What is the ultimate aim of life?

To attain *moksha* or realize God is the final aim and purpose of life. *Moksha* means freedom of the soul from the bondage of *maya* and the cycle of births and deaths. Furthermore the Bhakti Vedanta *sampradayas* believe that *moksha* includes the experience of the eternal bliss of God either in his abode or here in this world. However, followers of Kevaladvaita Vedanta believe *moksha* to



Liberation of the soul is the ultimate goal of all the Indian philosophies

be the merging of atman into Brahman (Ultimate Reality) when it attains true spiritual knowledge of itself as Brahman.

3. What are the four *purusharthas* (endeavours) of life?

The four *purusharthas* for a person are dharma (righteousness), *artha* (wealth acquired through righteous ways), *kama* (fulfilling one's carnal and worldly desires within

the disciplines of dharma) and *moksha* (liberation from material desires and the cycle of births and deaths) which is the final goal of life. In the liberated state the soul experiences God's divine bliss.

4. What is karma?

Karma means action or deed. Any mental thought, emotional feeling or physical action is called karma. Karma is both an individual act and also the sum total of all acts, both in the present life and in the preceding births. Furthermore, karma is the universal law of cause and effect. Though God is ultimately the all-doer, he has endowed humans with free will. In species of life other than humans they cannot make moral decisions but are governed by instinct. Good deeds by humans give merits and happiness, and bad deeds result in sin and suffering which he or she experiences in this or future lifetimes.

All souls reincarnate in various bodies depending upon the karmas performed in previous lives. Thus the principles of rebirth (*punarjanma*) and action (karma) are interrelated.

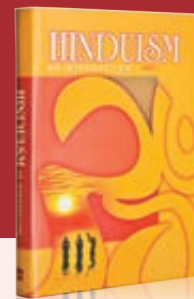
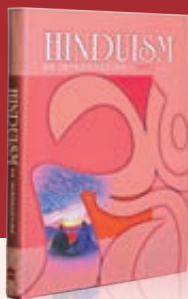
The law of karma, that is cause and effect, does not work automatically or by itself. God is the supervisor, controller and the giver of the fruits of one's actions (karma *phala pradata*). ♦



Serving food to the poor is a karma that confers *punya* (merits)

HINDUISM

AN INTRODUCTION



REVIEWS



'Hinduism, An Introduction', published by Swaminarayan Aksharpath, Ahmedabad, is an excellent primary source of information on the history, traditions, philosophies, festivals, deities, devotees and many other aspects of Hinduism.

The book is in two volumes, with a combined total of 712 pages and 748 photographs.

The publication was inaugurated by Pramukh Swami Maharaj (photo above) in Gondal on Diwali (5 November 2010). Since then several revered spiritual leaders and distinguished scholars, judges, doctors, scientists and other public figures have reviewed the book and kindly sent their opinions. With deep appreciation for their reviews, we share them with our readers in each issue. In this sixth instalment we share the reviews of three illustrious dignitaries.

Dr. C.S. Kedar, IAS

IAS, Director General

You have sent me a rich treasure in the form of a book "Hinduism" (in two parts), which I will cherish and greatly value its contribution to understanding and appreciating Dharma, which I have been following. Unlike most of the other religions which are revelations by a single guru and to be found in a single book, Hinduism is so ancient, deep and wide that any efforts to trace the Dharma to a single root source at this point of time would be Herculean. However,

for young practitioners of Hinduism, it is essential to find a single compact source wherein all the synthesized knowledge and preachings are poured into. This is what has been successfully accomplished in "Hinduism", an in-depth reading and introspectional analysis of which would not only enhance peoples' perception about Dharma but also satisfy the rational curiosity regarding its practices.

A great publication at the right time when

the whole world is getting stirred up by emotional extremisms. I am humbled by the tireless effort of Swaminarayan Aksharpith in bringing out such a sacred publication and putting it

in the hands of knowledge-thirsty and curious Hindu practitioners. I am again grateful to you for providing this book which will be a treasure trove to me for years to come.

Prof. Ranjit Roy Chaudhury

Member of Board of Governors, Medical Council of India and Padma Shri awardee

The two volumes of the exquisite and highly informative book “Hinduism - An Introduction” written in lucidly clear and simple language by Sadhu Vivekjivandas is undoubtedly a landmark publication. It provides a kaleidoscopic background of the many different features of this great religion. Not only does it deal with the spiritual and cultural heritage of Hinduism but it also explains the four main Hindu Sampradayas and introduces God and his manifestations.

As a medical scholar it was fascinating for me to read again about Ayurveda which today in this modern world of materialism and strife is providing a unique way of achieving physical and mental health in a holistic way to millions of persons both in India and outside India. Today the world is turning back to the knowledge contained in this book about medicine and healing by Charak in *Charaka Samhita*.

Dr. Prof. V.S. Vishnupottery

Professor of Sanskrit and Dean of Faculty of Sanskrit SCSVMV University, Enathur, Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu

The first volume introduces to the reader, the Hindu culture with a neat preface, followed by 14 topics like Sanathana Dharma, the fundamental beliefs and convictions of the Hindu society, the three major schools of the Hindu philosophy, the six Darsanas or pathways, the Vedanta principles, the traditions and customs of Hindu society and their significance and so on. This edition of 334 pages has been brought out with precise references, extensive bibliography and has also been appropriately illustrated with diagrams and rare photographs. The second part

The second volume contains an excellent history of the formation of the Swaminarayan Sampradaya by Bhagwan Swaminarayan and depicts facets of his glorious life in a manner which is a pleasure to read. This volume contains also an account of some of the great devotees like Nachiketa, Gargi and Sant Jnaneshwar. There is also a very interesting section describing Hindu Reformist movements like the Brahmo Samaj and the Arya Samaj.

The author, Sadhu Vivekjivandas, and the Editorial Consultant, Dr Janakbhai Dave, deserve our congratulations for providing us with such an intellectual extravaganza supported by the many interesting illustrations throughout the book. We also wish to pay our tribute to Pramukh Swami Maharaj for his divine guidance and leadership and for everything he has done for mankind.

speaks of various topics related to Indian tradition and customs from Sadhana to FAQs, on the topics discussed in 14 chapters. Each chapter in the book commences with a brief note of wisdom, expands the thoughts in smooth sequences and ends up with a summary of points discussed.

The book is a well researched document that has not deviated from its intension of providing clarity to lots of concepts in Hinduism and removing some of those misconceptions that have been created by the classical western

(Contd. on pg. 58)

DOWN MEMORY LANE

1952-2012

Brief History of BAPS Swaminarayan Yuvak Mandal, Surat

Several decades ago Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj instructed two leading devotees of Surat, Ashabhai Patel and Maganbhai Patel, “Start the Sunday satsang *sabha* in Surat.” Ashabhai replied matter-of-factly, “Swami, in Surat there are only three devotees. How can we start a *sabha* with only three people?” But Yogiji Maharaj patted his shoulders and blessed, “Ashabhai, start the *sabha* on my word. I wish to establish a mandir in Surat. So many aspirants will be attracted to the *sabha* that there will be a shortage of space to sit!”

And so the weekly BAPS satsang *sabha* was launched with only three devotees. Today, the phenomenal growth of the Sunday *sabha* and BAPS youth activities in Surat are a testimony to the prophecy of Yogiji Maharaj. Let us briefly chart through the journey of its growth.

❖ About 212 years ago, in 1799, Surat was sanctified by the holy feet of Nilkanth Varni, who was then 18 years old. He had stayed for three days at the Mota Godiya Bawa’s Mandir in the suburb of Mahidharpura. During lunchtime

Nilkanth Varni asked the mahant of the mandir for food. But the mahant said no food had been offered to the deity, so he had to fast. Thus, for three days Nilkanth got the same answer and he fasted during his stay there. On the fourth day, a gardener’s wife offered lunch to Nilkanth.

Thereafter, when Nilkanth became Shriji Maharaj, the devotees of Surat offered their profuse devotion and love for him. Shriji Maharaj, in response to Ardheswar Kotwal’s love, gave him his *pagh*, which is still displayed at his descendant’s home. Ever since Maharaj’s time great *paramhansas* and the Gunatit Guru *parampara* have blessed the soil of Surat.

❖ In 1833, the landmark meeting of Shastri Yagnapurushdas and Bhagatji Maharaj took place at the Swaminarayan Mandir in Surat. Thereafter, a dialogue on the Akshar Purushottam *upasana* between Bhagatji Maharaj and Vignananand Swami ignited a deep faith in the heart of young Swami Yagnapurushdas. Thus Surat became the starting point of a great mission that was later to result in the consecration



Brahmaswarup Yogiji Maharaj ritually inaugurates youth activities in Surat, 1960



Yogiji Maharaj blesses youths of the first yuvak mandal in Surat, 1954

of the *murtis* of Akshar-Purushottam Maharaj in the central shrine of mandirs and the birth of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha.

To further promote this Vedic philosophy, Shastriji Maharaj conducted a *parayan* on the Satsangijivan in the month of Shravan in 1943. At that time Swami had instructed Swami Narayanswarupdas, who was 22 years old, to read and elaborate upon the Satsangijivan shastra.

❖ In 1951, by the instructions of Yogiji Maharaj, the satsang *mandal* in Surat was born. At that time Ashabhai Patel, Maganbhai Patel and his son, Harikrishnabhai Patel, endeavoured untiringly for the growth of Satsang.

❖ In 1952, the youth activities was first established in Mumbai, and from there they spread to other centres. The youth activities in Surat were launched in 1953. The initial progress was slow, but to provide momentum Yogiji Maharaj officially established a *yuvak mandal* in Surat in 1960. He named it 'Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Yuvak Mandal, Surat'. At that time the *yuvak sabha* was held at Ashabhai's home at Ughadpagani Vadi, near Lal Darwaja. Yogiji Maharaj inspired the youths to continue the *sabha* on a regular basis. He would write letters detailing the *sabha* programme which included *dhun* and *prarthana*, reading of the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato and singing of bhajans. The first president of the Surat Yuvak Mandal was Harikrishnabhai M. Patel. Yogiji Maharaj's

incessant motivation and talks inspired the Surat Yuvak Mandal to prepare its first handwritten issue called 'Jnan Jyot' in 1960. All the articles were written by youths. Yogiji Maharaj inaugurated the issue on 10 August 1960 and showered his blessings on the youths. Swami read all the articles and thus inspired the youths. On that occasion Pramukh Swami Maharaj had also congratulated the youths.

❖ During the early years of satsang in Surat, Ashabhai Patel built a hall above his house in Sardarnagar for devotees to assemble in the weekly *sabha*. In April 1963, Pramukh Swami Maharaj consecrated the canvas *murtis* of Akshar Purushottam Maharaj in the hall, after which the weekly *sabha* was held there. Yogiji Maharaj often nourished the satsang through his visits to Surat. He addressed public assemblies, sanctified homes, gave personal audience to devotees and wrote letters. As the youth activities developed over the years the number of youths increased. The youths started a *mandal* in the Adajan area. Gradually, through the *vicharan* of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj new satsang centres flourished in South Gujarat, namely, Navsari, Valsad, Ukai, Vyara, Sankari, Rajpura, Farod, Rayan, Madhi, Vankaner, Bardoli, Kim, Kathor, Kosamba and other places. Sadhus from Mumbai travelled to these places along with youth volunteers for the spread of satsang. With the growth curve of satsang rising in Surat, Yogiji



Pramukh Swami Maharaj with the youths and devotees of Surat, 1973



BAPS youths of Surat served local residents of all backgrounds, 1974

Maharaj wished to make Surat the headquarters of satsang in South Gujarat. In addition, Yogiji Maharaj willed to build a three-spired mandir. To translate Swami's wish into reality many devotees like Ashabhai Patel, Maganbhai Patel, Ambubhai B. Patel, Shantibhai Patel, Ishwarbhai Rangwala and others helped in the mandir project. Among the youths were Harikrishnabhai M. Patel, Mahendrabhai M. Patel, Dhirendrabhai Vinchhi, Sureshbhai A. Patel and others. From 1969 onwards, BAPS sadhus from Mumbai mandir visited Surat twice a year. In 1969, the youths of Surat participated in a youth convention in Atladra, and won many prizes.

❖ In 1971, the bungalow of Jagirdas Sheth in the Nanavat area was purchased. On 15 August 1971 the youth assembly started to be held here.

❖ In 1971, the Youth Adhiveshan was held in Gondal in the presence of guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. The youths of Surat won many prizes.

❖ In 1972, satsang *sabha* and activities were launched by Pramukh Swami Maharaj's blessings in the suburbs of Rander and Dabholi in Surat. More satsang *sabhas* were started in the Navsari region in Italva, Vapi, Daman, Chala and Selvas. In addition satsang activities were launched in the Valsad region in Segvi, Dharasana, Dungri, Vaghai, Golvad, Udanch and Donja.

❖ In March 1973, the satsang centre in Nanavat (Surat) at Sheth Jagirdas' bungalow was transformed into a mandir by Swamishri's wish.

Pujya Mahant Swami installed the Akshar Purushottam and Guru Parampara *murtis* (in canvas) from Kampala in the mandir. At that time 28 satsang centres were active in Surat. In the same year a grand youth convention was held in Surat from 29 January to 4 February 1973. Swamishri presided over the convention and on 1 February, at the Rang Upavan Hall, Kothari Bhaktipriya Swami, Viveksagar Swami, Bhagvatpriya Swami and Shrihari Swami were honoured for attaining PhDs in Sanskrit. On this occasion the renowned social worker, Shri Ravishankar Maharaj, was the chief guest of the assembly.

❖ On 2 February 1973 the youth cell had successfully organized a grand *nagar yatra* (procession) on the streets of Surat. On this occasion, Swamishri had sent his blessings by letter, "The youth activities were started by Yogiji Maharaj, through which youths and their lives are genuinely moulded. The activities help inculcate *upasana*, *agna*, *niyam* and moral values. One also comes to understand the true worth of life. Every youth should actively participate in these activities. It will be a great service."

Gradually the number of youths increased. Educated youths like the well-known engineer and building contractor, Vajubhai Tank, Sureshbhai Joshi, Jayantibhai Parmar, Narsinhbhai Gangajaliya, Dineshbhai Tank, Dhirendrabhai Vinchhi and others actively offered their services for making plans of mandirs and in the construc-



Youths of Surat present a drama during the *adhiveshan* in Gondal, 1978



Handwritten magazines prepared by youths of Surat, in which Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj penned their blessings

tion work. Since 1974, the youths of Surat have made drinking water arrangements at the Nanavat mandir for people celebrating Janmashtami and Ganesh Utsav on the streets.

❖ On 12 December 1975 the Vedic *murti-pratishtha* rituals were performed by Pramukh Swami Maharaj at the Nanavat mandir. A grand procession of the *murtis* was carried out in Surat. Thousands of devotees also celebrated Swamishri's 55th birthday, during which the Chief Minister of Gujarat Shri Babubhai Jashbhai Patel was present. The entire festival was managed by 70 youths of Surat. Their phenomenal services were appreciated and exemplary.

❖ In 1976, Swamishri appointed Sanatan Swami, Yogeshwar Swami and Shrijinandan Swami to nourish the growing satsang community. At that time Swamishri wrote a letter instructing Yogeshwar Swami to concentrate on youth activities. Swamishri wrote, "1. Youths should develop character. 2. Their lives should be *seva*-oriented and simple. 3. They understand the glory of Shastriji Maharaj and Yogiji Maharaj and their presence. 4. All understand the pure and supreme knowledge of Akshar-Purushottam."

❖ In July 1978, a satsang youth training camp was organized. Through speeches by sadhus, discussions and workshops, the youths were given training. In the same year, the *yuvak*

mandal of Kosamba pilgrimaged 3,000 km on bicycles and set a new record in Satsang.

❖ From 1976 to 1981 the youth forum of Surat spread the message of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the city and rural areas on the occasion of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Bicentenary Celebrations.

❖ In 1978 a National Youth Convention was held in Gondal. The youths of Surat participated with fervour. They had prepared a handwritten issue of 'Jnan Jyot'. Swamishri blessed and lauded the youths for their efforts.

In November 1978 the youth forum presented kirtan-bhakti programmes in Antroli and other villages of South Gujarat.

❖ In 1979, the Surat *yuvak mandal* started a drive to enrol lifetime members for the Sanstha's monthly *Swaminarayan Prakash-Patrika* and *Premvati*. In the same year, the youths participated in the city municipality competition by decorating a truck with anti-addiction posters.

Under the auspices of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's Bicentenary Celebrations the youths of Surat organized a blood donation camp, medical camp, veterinary camp, teachers' training camp and other social services. Study circles were also held for youths in which expert speakers guided and enlightened them on satsang and value-based topics.

To encourage the spirit of service in youths,



Youths organized a grand procession through the streets of Surat to honour Pramukh Swami Maharaj, 1975



Youths offered heartfelt devotion to guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj on his 55th birthday celebration, 1975

a service corps (*swayamsevak dal*) was formed. The youth corps performed *seva* during festive celebrations and satsang occasions. By 1980, 1,000 youths had registered as *swayamsevaks*.

❖ On the celebration of the 75th anniversary of BAPS in 1982 the youths of Surat had prepared a handwritten issue called 'Amrut Yagna'. The issue contained articles, drawings, incidents of the guru *parampara* and messages of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj. Swamishri wrote a message of blessings to the youths and praised their efforts.

❖ On 27 March 1982, the Surat *yuvak mandal* organized a 'Teachers Knowledge Seminar' at Bhandut village, in Olpad taluka. Teachers from 60 surrounding villages attended. The theme of the seminar was based on Swamishri's message: 'Valueless Education Destroys'.

❖ From 30 April to 2 May 1982, the *yuvak mandal* organized a three-day dental camp. More than 350 patients were treated free of cost.

❖ With the growing number of devotees attending the weekly *sabha* the Nanavat mandir proved to be too small in accommodating all. Thus Pramukh Swami Maharaj decided to construct a *shikharbaddh* mandir in Surat. By Swamishri's grace a plot of land by the river Tapi was acquired. On 8 January 1982, the land was sanctified by Thakorji and Swamishri. At that time Swamishri wrote a letter of blessing, "By the grace of Maharaj, Swami and (Yogi) Bapa a beautiful and excellent mandir will come up by the banks of the river in Surat. May all be blessed with the strength to help and do *seva* with body, mind and wealth."

Thereafter, the youths of Surat participated in the mandir building activities. To buoy their spirits, satsang assemblies and picnics were arranged at the mandir site.

❖ In 1983, a local Youth Festival was organized in Surat. Swamishri attended the festival, and inspired and blessed all. The youths had prepared another handwritten issue of 'Akshar Jyot'.

❖ The youths of Surat were equally adept in social work. During the 7-day *parayan* on the Ramayana in April' 1984, an anti-addiction programme was arranged by the youths. In all, 300 people gave up vices.

❖ The youths of Surat inspired values in people by travelling to the rural areas around Surat. The youths who had put in great efforts were Jayantibhai Parmar, Narsinhbhai Gangajaliya, Vinubhai Patel and others.

❖ In 1988, the youths of Surat performed a month-long *parayan* on the Harililamrut. To utilize the summer vacation, a local camp was also organized in Surat. During that period the youths were taught yoga *asans*, pranayam, public speaking and how to conduct an assembly.

❖ In 1990, a grand Youth Convention was organized in Vidyanagar at Swamishri's wish. Prior to that, Swamishri addressed the youths in Surat, "With so many youths here, what can't be achieved by you! In fact it will not take long to colour the city of Surat with satsang." In 1992, during the Centenary Celebrations of Yogiji Maharaj in Gandhinagar, the youths of Surat performed *seva* by constructing the pillarless assembly hall, with a seating capacity of 40,000. At that time Yogendra Swami led and guided the *yuvak mandal*.

❖ In 1994, the river Tapi overflowed its banks, thus flooding some parts of the city. Thereafter, in plague-afflicted Surat, BAPS youths performed relief services with dedication when doctors and relatives of patients left the city out of fear of getting infected.

❖ In 1995, the Amrut Mahotsav of Pramukh Swami Maharaj was celebrated in Mumbai. More than 450 youth volunteers of Surat served untiringly in various departments of the festival. They left a deep impression of their efficiency, hard work and courage by doing all kinds of *seva*.

❖ When the *mandir pratishtha* day was drawing nearer, 300 BAPS youths of Surat contributed in doing physical *seva* from 9.00 p.m. to 1.00 a.m. each day.

❖ On 16 December 1996, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* in the *shikharbaddh* Swaminarayan Mandir in Adajan, Surat. The next day, on 17 December, Swamishri's 76th birthday was celebrated with great jubilation and fanfare.

❖ In 1998, the flooded river Tapi inundated many parts of Surat, thus creating a catastrophe. BAPS youths performed relief activities.

❖ In 2002, a satsang *shibir* on the theme 'With Pramukh Swami's Company... Akshardham is the Goal' was held at the BAPS mandir in Gadhada. More than 700 male and female youths participated. It was a novel addition to the youth activities.

❖ On 25 January 2005, Pramukh Swami Maharaj performed the *pratishtha* rituals of Nilkanth *abhishek murti* in the *rang mandap* of the mandir in Surat.

❖ In 2005, the opening of Akshardham in New Delhi took place. During the 35-day celebrations 700 youths from Surat offered their voluntary services.

❖ In 2006, Surat experienced its biggest floods in history after the river Tapi overflowed. More than 60 percent of Surat was affected. About 70 percent of the homes of devotees were flooded with water. In spite of this calamity, thousands of youths, on Swamishri's word, joined in the relief work and cleaning-up project.

❖ From 2005 onwards, one-day youth training camps were held three times every year for the youths of Surat. The camps saw 3,500 to 4,000 youths availing of satsang knowledge and values taught by sadhus.

❖ In 2008, a five-day youth *shibir* 'Iti Vachanamrutam' was held in the presence of Dr Swami in Sarangpur. For the first time an exhibition on the Vachanamrut was held. Ever since, more than 2,600 boys and girls participate in these annual *shibirs*. They learn personal, family and spiritual values for their holistic development. The entire planning and execution of these *shibirs* are done by youth volunteers.

❖ In October 2011, a pilgrimage to Akshardham (New Delhi) and Chhapaiya was organized from Surat. In all, 850 male and female youths participated.

❖ Every year seminars on career guidance for students and graduates are held at the mandir. In addition, sports day and study circles are organized.

❖ Another unique contribution of Surat city is its 90 youths who have become sadhus at the hands of Swamishri.

The youth activities in Surat have developed and flourished under the guidance of Ghanshyamcharan Swami, sadhus and youth leaders. On list there are 4,000 male and female youths who practice satsang. Due to satsang in Surat, 3,500 youths do daily puja and 1,800 offer *panchang pranam* to their parents daily. About 2,200 youths read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato daily. Hundreds of youth volunteers in the surrounding rural areas of Surat are also active in satsang activities.

By Yogiji Maharaj's blessings the satsang activities in Surat started with only three devotees. Today, there are 20 BAPS Sanskardhams, 21 *yuvak mandals*, 72 *yuvati mandals*, 231 *bal mandals*, 225 *balika mandals*, 63 satsang *mandals* and 145 *mahila mandals*. The activities are run by 1,609 *karyakars*. In addition, the satsang activities in rural areas are conducted under the Surat mandir. There are eight *hari* mandirs in the rural area and 90 villages to which sadhus visit. In all, there are 21 *yuvak mandals*, 18 *yuvati mandals*, 90 *bal mandals*, 32 *balika mandals*, 75 satsang *mandals*, 80 *mahila mandals* and 443 *karyakars* in the rural area.

The birth and growth of the youth activities in Surat have been possible through the efforts and blessings of Pramukh Swami Maharaj, his sadhus, volunteers and devotees. ♦

Gujarati Text: Praful Narola, Jayesh Avaiya, Dhaval Cheta, Bharat Gabani, Sanjay Bagadiya, Jignesh Narola and Dr Anil Chalodiya

DOWN MEMORY LANE

1952-2012

Brief History of BAPS Swaminarayan Yuvak Mandal, Rajkot

To commemorate the year-long 60th Anniversary Celebrations of BAPS Swaminarayan Youth Activities (1952-2012), the milestone events of the birth and development of Rajkot Yuvak Mandal have been presented here. In forthcoming issues, the accounts of other mandals will also be similarly presented.

Colourful Rajkot! An appellation that fittingly comes from the exotic culture and work life of its people. Rajkot is popularly known as the gateway to and capital of the Saurashtra region. Bhagwan Swaminarayan had visited Rajkot and blessed its people with the colour of Satsang.

The city's history chronicles the story of Bhagwan Swaminarayan's favourable impression on Sir John Malcolm, the Governor of Mumbai State, and Colonel Walker. When he came in 1830 to meet the Governor in Rajkot Bhagwan Swaminarayan took his morning bath in the river Aji prior to performing his puja ritual at the Mahadev Mandir. The Mahadev Mandir

still stands today.

Rajkot has also played a pivotal role in spreading the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*. The Gunatit gurus have nourished and given momentum to the Satsang during their visits to Rajkot. Krishnaji Ada of Rajkot, a prominent exponent of the Akshar-Purushottam philosophy, had also significantly contributed to the spread of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana*.

The youthful Sadhu Yagnapurushdasji (Shastriji Maharaj) stayed at the Swaminarayan Mandir in the Danapith area of Rajkot to study Sanskrit from Jivanram Shastri at the Hatkeshwar Mandir. During his stay there he gave fillip to the Satsang by establishing the first



Youths with Yogiji Maharaj after their *adhiveshan* drama performance, 1968



Youths honour Pramukh Swami Maharaj during a youth assembly, 1974

yuvak mandal.

Another outstanding event in Rajkot was the meeting of Yogiji Maharaj with Shastriji Maharaj after he left Junagadh in July 1911. The city is a witness to the days leading to the establishment of the BAPS. Prior to the mandir in Kadiya Sheri Shastriji Maharaj used to stay at Krishnaji Ada's house by the banks of river Aji. On every *ekadashi* satsang and *dhun*-bhajan were held at Ada's house.

In those difficult days the devotees who stood by Shastriji Maharaj were Shamaldas Pujara (of Janta Guesthouse), his son Lalitbhai, Himatlal Premjibhai Pujara, Tapubhai P. Jhala, Pragjibhai Dul and his son Gordhanbhai, Tapubhai Jhala's mother Jadaavben and many others.

Yogiji Maharaj succeeded as guru in 1951 after Shastriji Maharaj passed away. Thereafter, he contributed immensely to the growth of Satsang there. Rajkot was dear to Yogiji Maharaj. The devotees who also played a vital role in the growth of Satsang in Rajkot included Narayanbhai Morarjibhai Sheth, Haribhai Morarji Sheth, Jhaverkaka, Shri Ajagiya, Dr Tank, Adhiya Master, Anada, Chandubhai Anada, Lakshmidas Ganatra, Bhanubhai Gadhiya, Chunibhai Chaturvedi, Ramjibhai Kakkad, Chandrakantbhai Trivedi, Nathabhai Soni and others.

In 1954, Yogiji Maharaj officially inaugurated

the *yuvak mandal* in Rajkot. From this point onwards Satsang flourished gradually. Pramukh Swami Maharaj, too, has immensely nourished and multiplied the Satsang in the last forty years.

1954: Inauguration of Yuvak Mandal at Ada's Shrine

Yogiji Maharaj had incepted the *yuvak mandal* at Ada's memorial shrine. On reading the names of 21 youths in the *mandal*'s register Yogiji Maharaj willed, "I wish to have 51 youths in Rajkot." Yogiji Maharaj inspired Chunibhai Chaturvedi, Ghanshyambhai Dul and others to contact new youths. From henceforth these youths would contact new youths every week and bring them on their bicycles to attend the *sabha* at the mandir. Thereafter they would give them a ride home on their bicycles. Sometimes some parents refused their sons to go. But the *satsangi* youths remained unflagging in their efforts and the weekly attendance in the *sabha* continued to increase.

At that time the *yuvak sabha*'s agenda included *dhun*, *prarthana*, recitation of Swamini Vato by *yuvaks*, and reading of Yogiji Maharaj's handwritten postcard about the *sabha*. Some devotees like Mohanlal Ajagiya, Gordhanbhai Dul and Vallabhbhai Popat explained a Vachanamrut in the *yuvak sabha*.



Youths serve in the BAPS bookstall during the city's annual Janmashtami Fair



Yogiji Maharaj affectionately blesses a youth

Morning Youth Rally for Establishing a Mandir in Rajputpura

In 1967 Yogiji Maharaj consecrated a *hari* mandir for the first time in Rajkot at the bungalow of Rajmoti Oil Mill in Rajputpura suburb. The *yuvak sabha* was held in the terrace of the bungalow. At Yogiji Maharaj's behest the youths daily conducted morning bhakti rallies (*bhakti feris*) in different streets to collect funds for the mandir *pratishtha* in Rajputpura.

Shri Haribhai Kakkad would get up at 3.00 a.m. to awaken the youths for these morning rallies. In all, 15-20 youths joined the rallies to sing *dhun*. The pious donated 4 *annas*, 8 *annas* or even Rs. 1. If anyone gave Rs. 1.25 in donation then the youths would stand outside the person's house and sing *dhun* for his progress and well-being. The donor would be given sugar as *prasad*. Once Yogiji Maharaj was asleep at a house called 'Vishnu Nivas'. On hearing the *dhun* by youths he said, "Whoever listens to the Swaminarayan *dhun* will be liberated." When the youths returned from their morning bhakti rally Yogiji Maharaj would lovingly enquire of them. The youths held the morning rallies for 1½ to 2 years and collected Rs. 86,000 for the mandir project.

1976: Murti-Pratishtha at Rajputpura

Yogiji Maharaj had instructed all the *sat-sangi* youths to donate one month's pay for

the *pratishtha* of the *hari* mandir. The youths complied and also appealed to shopowners and friends to donate. They collected Rs. 5,000. After the mandir was inaugurated the *yuvaks* stayed at night for the mandir security.

1970, Yuvak Adhiveshan in Atladra

In the 1970 Youth Adhiveshan 12 youths from Rajkot participated. The youths performed a drama titled 'Miracle of Akshar Deri' and won a prize in kirtan singing.

On the occasion of the *pratishtha* rituals of Ghanshyam Maharaj in Gondal Mandir the *yuvaks* of Rajkot performed an impressive *ras*.

1974: Yuvak Adhiveshan in Gondal

On 4 April 1974 Shri Shambhusinh Jadeja was appointed as the first president of the Rajkot Yuvak Mandal. At that time 50 to 70 youths attended the weekly *yuvak sabha*. In reference to this Pramukh Swami Maharaj blessed, "We shall have 125 *yuvaks*."

In 1974, 60 youths from Rajkot participated in the Yuvak Adhiveshan. They performed enthusiastically in the competitions, namely, group kirtan singing, painting and preparing a handwritten magazine.

1975

The Yuvak Mandal of Rajkot started a music



Youths promote the Bicentenary Celebrations of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in 1981



Youths dedicate 221,271 *mala anussthans* to Pramukh Swami Maharaj on the occasion of his 71st birthday

band on Pramukh Swami Maharaj's word. The devotees sponsored Rs. 2000 for the instruments.

During the renovation of the *hari* mandir in Dangra Swamishri told the youths, "Make the best of uniforms for the youth band. We want you to play during the 1981 celebrations." Swamishri himself chose the colours of the uniform for the youth band – blue trousers and white shirts. The Akshar-Purushottam Band had 12 youth performers.

1979: Birthday Celebration and Macchu Dam Disaster-Relief Work

On the occasion of Swamishri's 59th Birthday Celebration in Rajkot, the Rajkot *yuvak mandal* had offered their devotion and services by gifting 79 items, namely, a *pagh*, eating bowl (*pattar*), *dhotiya*, slippers, etc., to Swamishri for his personal use.

In the aftermath of the Macchu Dam disaster in Morbi 80 to 100 youths from Rajkot offered voluntary services in the relief work. To raise funds for the relief work youths held a public show comprising of a drama called 'Anmol Moti', and a shadow play on Vachanamrut Loya 3 at the Women's College Hall in Rajkot.

1981: Seva at the Bicentenary Celebrations

In 1981, during the Bhagwan Swaminarayan Bicentenary Celebration, the music band of

Rajkot *yuvak mandal* led the grand *nagaryatra* on the streets of Ahmedabad. The youths played with gusto throughout the four-and-a-half-hour long procession. The youths also served food to devotees in dining halls during the celebration.

To raise funds for satsang activities the youths cleaned cycles, polished shoes and sold fruit juices to devotees.

In the popular melas of Rajkot the *yuvaks* ran ice-cream stalls, bookstalls, and assembled music record players to raise funds.

The making of *hindolas* in the mandir each year was assigned to youths. During the Bicentenary Celebrations in 1981 the Rajkot *yuvak mandal* had made an ornate *hindola* with 200 doors.

Under the auspices of the Bicentenary Celebration the Rajkot *yuvak mandal* performed 100 kirtan bhakti concerts in the city and neighbouring villages. To create public awareness for the Bicentenary Celebrations the youths also imprinted wall signs.

1984

During the summer vacation about 50 *karyakars* inspired noble values and character in 14 villages under the Sanstha's project 'Our Village, a Value-based Village'.

In each village the volunteers cleaned public



Pramukh Swami Maharaj blesses a handwritten magazine prepared by the youths



Pramukh Swami Maharaj blesses youth volunteers

places, roads and walls, performed street plays, conducted morning rallies (*feris*) and helped pledge people to give up addictions.

During the 199th birthday celebration of Gunatitanand Swami in Bhadra the youths of Rajkot looked after the accommodation department. In Dhrol they had arranged for mattresses, drinking water and cloakroom facilities for the festival guests.

1986

Several BAPS youth singers of Rajkot performed kirtan *aradhanas* in Rajkot, Jamnagar, Bhuj, Panandhro, Junagadh and other places.

1989

On 5 July 1989 Shri Harikrishna Maharaj and Swamishri were honoured in a horse drawn chariot on the main street of Rajkot on Rath Yatra day.

1990

On New Year's Day 200 youths of Rajkot performed *dandvats* from Rajkot to Gondal mandir for Swamishri's darshan. Swamishri blessed them and declared that they had received the fruits of 100 Ashwamedh *yagnas*.

1991

For Swamishri's 71st Birthday Celebration 100 youths had accomplished 221,271 *malas* and offered their devotion.

1992, 1995 & 2005

During the three celebrations of Yogi Shatabdi (1992), Amrut Mahotsav (1995) and inauguration of Akshardham, New Delhi (2005) the youths of Rajkot served sincerely in the foodstalls.

1994

The youths successfully participated in anti-addiction and character-building campaigns

named 'Sanskar Jyot' in Rajkot and neighbouring villages. To further wean people from addictions the youths prepared 200 posters and displayed them in doctors' clinics, hospitals and public places.

1998

As part of the *shikharbaddh* mandir construction project young and old devotees joined in the paper collection campaign to raise money. The *yuvak mandal* also rendered its services at the stone quarries in Rajasthan and the mandir construction site. The youths used to help in arranging the stones in the mandir. They also polished the stones once they were put in place.

Members of the *yuvak mandal* ceremoniously honoured Shri Harikrishna Maharaj twice by performing *tula* and donated for the mandir construction. Many youths gave up eating sweet items for ten years till the mandir construction and *pratishtha* rituals were done.

2001

For months, the Rajkot *yuvak mandal* performed yeoman service during the Kutch earthquake relief programme. They travelled to various places of Saurashtra to gather relief materials and thereafter to distribute them to the victims.

2006

The Rajkot youth *shibir* at Gadhada was themed on 'Born for BAPS'. More than 350 male and female youths participated in the *shibir*.

2007

During the BAPS Centenary Celebrations in Ahmedabad the youth volunteers of Rajkot managed the massive evening assembly arrangements.

In the same year a spiritual camp was held for youths in Junagadh Mandir on the theme 'One

Step Ahead'. In all, 475 male and female youths participated.

2008

A spiritual youth camp was held in Tithal where 600 male and female youths attended.

A cavalcade of 500 youths on bicycles displayed anti-addiction placards as part of the decennial celebrations of BAPS Mandir, Rajkot.

2009

Fifteen hundred youths pilgrimaged by foot from Rajkot to Gondal to give an invitation to Swamishri to come to Rajkot.

The Rajkot *yuvak mandal* attained first rank in speech, *nirupan*, and a question-answer exam during the National Youth Convention.

A youth camp on the theme 'Asmita' was organized at Sarangpur Mandir. Over 1,100 youths attended.

2010

A youth camp on the theme 'Youths Awaken' was held at Gadhada Mandir. Over 1,100 youths attended.

2011

A youth camp on the theme 'His Mission, Our Vision' was held at Gondal Akshar Mandir. More than 1,700 youths attended.

The *yuvak mandal* of Rajkot was inaugurated in 1954 with only a few youths. At present 13 *yuvak mandals* are active in Rajkot. The Sunday *yuvak sabha* in the mandir was first launched with only 21 youths but today 1,000 boys and girls regularly attend.

From 2006 an annual *shibir* for youths was started during the Janmashtami holidays. In its inaugural year 350 youths attended, whereas today the count has reached 1,100. Because of these annual *shibirs* many male and female youths have stopped going to the Navratri *garbas* and instead participate in the bhakti

parva programme.

Every year, prior to their final exams, 3,500 boys and girls studying in standards 10 and 12 participate in the *mahapuja* and prayer assembly at the mandir to gain confidence and strengthen faith.

Ever since the *pratishta* of the *shikharbaddh* mandir in Rajkot in 1998 the mandir is cleaned daily by female youths in the afternoon and male youths at night. Daily 20 to 25 youths attend the *shayan arti* and then clean the mandir for two hours. Thereafter they read the Vachanamrut and Swamini Vato and sing the *cheshta*. This is followed by spiritual discussions (*goshti*) with sadhus.

Through the immense efforts and blessings of Yogiji Maharaj and Pramukh Swami Maharaj, who have sanctified the homes of thousands of devotees, and the continuing efforts of sadhus and volunteers, Satsang in Rajkot has been progressing day by day.

Yogiji Maharaj had initiated the singing of *dhun* and *sabha* at the homes of devotees. At that time 15 devotees attended, whereas today the attendance has increased to 4,500 in the weekly Sunday assembly. In addition, there are 170 *bal-balika mandals*, 38 *yuvak-yuvati mandals*, 32 *sanyukta mandals* and 120 *mahila mandals*. The participation of youths in the satsang activities is noteworthy.

The youths offer their invaluable services in the planning, organization and execution of *shibirs*, anti-addiction campaigns, relief work, *annakut prasad* distribution, and other *sevas*. The dedication of BAPS sadhus and full-time volunteers to please Bhagwan Swaminarayan and Swamishri is truly praiseworthy. ♦

Vicharan

PRAMUKH SWAMI MAHARAJ'S

1 June to 13 July 2012, Sarangpur, Ahmedabad

1 TO 14 JUNE: SARANGPUR

Swamishri's daily routine included Thakorji's darshan in the mandir and *rang mandap* and then he blessed the guests, dignitaries and devotees from the assembly stage. Soon thereafter he returned to his room to do puja. During the day Swamishri performed a few exercises, attended to some letters from devotees, listened to discourses, and heard satsang reports by sadhus during his meal times. Between 6.30 and 7.30 p.m. Swamishri was taken around in a wheelchair in the hall adjacent to his room where sadhus sang verses from the *Chosath Padi*. Thereafter, Swamishri briefly addressed the sadhus.

5 Tuesday to 8 Friday; National BAPS Youth Convention

As part of the 60th anniversary of BAPS Youth Activities a four-day convention (*adhiveshan*) was held in Swamishri's presence, wherein several competitions including *mukhpath* (recitations), singing, elocution and *nirupan*

were held for two days, and thereafter a one-and-a-half day *shibir* was held. More than 3,500 male and female youths participated in the four-day convention. (Details in *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July-August 2012.)

14, Thursday, Sarangpur, Ahmedabad

Swamishri departed from Sarangpur at 10.50 a.m. and arrived at the BAPS mandir in Shahibaug, Ahmedabad, at 1.15 p.m. Thousands of devotees had assembled in the mandir complex for Swamishri's darshan. After having Thakorji's darshan Swamishri blessed all from far. Thereafter he retired for rest.

MID-JUNE: AHMEDABAD 15, Friday

At 7.00 a.m. Swamishri had Thakorji's darshan and thereafter left for SAL Hospital in Ahmedabad to have a pacemaker implanted by renowned cardiologist Dr Tejas Patel. (Details in *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July-August 2012.)

National BAPS Youth Convention, Sarangpur



16, Saturday

The morning after his pacemaker implant, Swamishri came out of his residence for Thakorji's darshan and to bless all. Ever since, his daily routine included Thakorji's darshan, blessing invited guests and devotees from far, attending to letters, daily exercise, listening to satsang reports and experiences by sadhus during his meal times. Swamishri also briefly attended the Sunday satsang *sabha* that was webcast live.

Every morning devotees came for Swamishri's darshan with great spiritual fervour. Some came as early as 6.00 a.m. to take their prime places for darshan. In the interim period they listened to *katha*.

21, Thursday; Rath Yatra Celebration

The Rath Yatra celebration was held in the Swaminarayan Mandir precincts. The festive ambience was exhilarating and the devotees in the mandir precincts savoured the *rath yatra* in the presence of Swamishri. (Details and photos in *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July-August 2012.)

27, Wednesday

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of *arti* of *murtis* for BAPS *hari* mandirs in Palsana and Siswa.

JULY: AHMEDABAD

3, Tuesday; Guru Purnima

The Swaminarayan Mandir in Shahibaug was saturated with devotees who had come from far and wide to celebrate Guru Punam in the presence of Swamishri. The morning festival assembly commenced with speeches from senior sadhus. Swamishri also came to bless the devotees in the assembly. He was honoured with garlands by senior sadhus and thereafter he spoke and blessed the assembly. More than 30,000 devotees were served *mahaprasad*. (Details and photos in *Swaminarayan Bliss*, July-August 2012.)

5, Thursday; Hindola Festival and Nagpur BAPS Shikharbaddh Mandir Pratishtha

Swamishri performed the *murti-pratishtha* rituals of the *murtis* for the *shikharbaddh* BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in Nagpur, Maharashtra. Swamishri performed the rituals of *arti*, *mantra pushpanjali* and offered flowers at the feet of all the *murtis*. Swamishri also blessed the devotees who had come from Nagpur.

With the beginning of the month-long *hindola* festival Swamishri rocked Shri Harikrishna Maharaj in a floral *hindola*. ♦

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas

In Ahmedabad Swamishri performs the *pratishtha arti* of the the *murtis* for the BAPS Mandir in Nagpur



Living With Swamishri

June-July, Ahmedabad

“DO MALA AND BHAJAN!”

26.6.12, Ahmedabad

Several youths were performing a skit on “Shriji says...” before Swamishri on the mandir grounds. The lead performer instructed, “Shriji says clap your hands.” But none of the participants responded. He tried a few more times but the youths did not heed to his commands. Then the lead player realized that Shriji Maharaj is present in Swamishri, so they all asked Swamishri, “What should we do?” Swamishri instantly gestured with his fingers to indicate bhajan and said, “Do *mala* and bhajan!”

Swamishri emphasized the need to do bhajan, which inspires joy and peace of mind in our hectic and problem-ridden lives.

SHRIJI MAHARAJ RESIDES IN SWAMISHRI

1.7.12, Ahmedabad

With the rains playing truant in Gujarat, the entire state was reeling under forecasts of a poor monsoon season. With these apprehensions people from all walks of life requested Swamishri to bless Gujarat with rains.

Today, after a brief skit on the subject of rain a sadhu concluded, “Swami, Indra (rain-god) says that it is in your hands to bring the rains.”

Swamishri pointed towards the *murti* of Shriji Maharaj and said, “God is seated here. He will bring the rains.”

“Then you say that it is in God’s hands?” the sadhu asked.

“Yes,” Swamishri replied.

“Dr Swami, what has Bapa said?” the sadhu asked.

“God resides in you, so make the rains shower,” Dr Swami spoke to Swamishri.

“Now, Bapa, is what Dr Swami said true?” the sadhu asked Swamishri.

“True,” Swamishri replied.

Swamishri’s answer inspired a wave of joy and applause.

SWAMISHRI IS FROM AKSHARDHAM

11.7.12, Ahmedabad

A lighted-hearted dialogue by sadhus about Swamishri’s greatness took place in his presence. Some said that Swamishri belongs to Punjab, another claimed that he belongs to Sarangpur, and someone added that he belongs to Akshardham in Gandhinagar.

Hariprakash Swami asked, “Bapa, where are you from?”

Ishwarcharan Swami explained, “Bapa is from Akshardham.”

Swamishri confirmed the reply, “Yes, (I’m) from Akshardham.”

Instantly Vishwavihari Swami asked, “Are you from the Akshardham in Gandhinagar or the one in New Delhi?”

“I’m from Maharaj’s Akshardham,” Swamishri replied.

Swamishri’s answer revealed that he is not of this world, but from the eternal and divine abode of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

SWAMISHRI’S INSPIRING WORDS

On most days after Swamishri had darshan of Thakorji in the morning a brief presentation was made beneath the mandir dome and a question was asked to him. Swamishri’s answers are inspiring and revealing:

3 June, Sarangpur

Q. What should one do to always remember that one’s true form is *atma*?

A. Bhajan.

(Contd. on pg. 58)

Raksha Bandhan Celebration

2 August 2012, Ahmedabad



Swamishri blesses Brahmin devotees during their *janoi* changing ceremony



Swamishri blesses all

From early morning, as devotees eagerly entered the mandir all received a sanctified *rakhdi* before they took their seat. Thousands of devotees, young and old, packed every available vantage point for Swamishri's darshan on this special day.

As Swamishri emerged from the lift on his colourfully decorated wheelchair, *balaks* greeted him by holding a giant *rakhdi* on which was written a prayer 'Swami Bapa! *Amari tame raksha karo.*' – 'Swami Bapa! Please protect us.' When Swamishri arrived in the open compound, Brahmin devotees were seated, ready to change their *janois* as per their annual tradition. As they raised their arms holding the *janoi* Swamishri too raised his arms and signalled to them to put on their new *janois*.

Then, Swamishri arrived on the small decorated platform set up beneath Yogiji Maharaj's shrine for the Raksha Bandhan celebration.

First, together everyone sang '*Tvameva mātā cha pitā tvameva...*' and '*Shobho sādhubune sadā saral ne...*' to convey the sentiments that Swamishri

is father, mother and guru to all devotees.

Thereafter, Ishwarcharan Swami prayed to Swamishri on behalf of all devotees, "May Maharaj forever protect us in the form of Swamishri. As stated in Vachanamrut Gadhada III 39 may all be protected from the bondage of bodily and worldly attachments. May we develop affection and attachment towards you. May we always develop *nirdosh bhav* towards you through mind, action and speech. And may we all maintain *samp*, *suhradbhav* and *ekta* and serve you and the Satsang."

On this occasion, Swamishri also launched the Satsang exam ebooks for reading on the iPad, Kindle and other e-readers. The files are available for free download from the Sanstha's website (<http://www.baps.org/ebooks>).

Swamishri further blessed the devotees as everyone held up the *rakhdis* they had been given on entry. Thereafter Swamishri went for Thakorji's darshan and returned to his room.

In this way, thousands of devotees participated in this brief, yet memorable Raksha Bandhan celebration. ♦

UK & Europe

CELEBRATING WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY
9 June 2012, UK



Every year, 5 June is celebrated by millions internationally as World Environment Day (WED). Established in 1972 by the United Nations, WED is one of the principal vehicles through which the UN raises worldwide awareness for the environment and enhances action.

As an affiliate of the United Nation's Economic and Social Council, BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha celebrated WED in the UK with a presentation featuring a series of eye-opening facts about water consumption, practical tips on safely cutting back and encouraging efficient water consumption techniques.

To help save water and lessen the burden on the environment, devotees were encouraged to make a number of small but important lifestyle changes. These changes included:

- Turning off the tap whilst brushing teeth
- Making sure taps are turned off properly
- Fixing or reporting dripping taps
- Reducing showers to four minutes
- Only filling the kettle with the amount of water that is required
- Only using the washing machine with a full load
- Installing a water butt in the garden to use when watering plants.

BAPS CHILDREN'S FORUM RECEIVES GOLD AWARD FOR SUPPLEMENTARY EDUCATION
7 July 2012, London, UK



BAPS Children's Forum has received the Gold Award from the National Resource Centre (NRC) for its "high standards of service in providing supplementary education to the community". Based at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, London, it is the first supplementary school in the London borough of Brent & Harrow to have achieved the gold standard.

The NRC is a national agency operating within ContinYou, one of UK's leading education charities.

Among its various activities, BAPS Children's Forum organizes a Sunday school to teach Gujarati, in which it has attained a 100% success rate in GCSE exams, with more than half of the students receiving a grade A or A*.

During the weekly classes, some 70 volunteers assist the 350 students. The school also strives to provide value-based education helping young people develop into responsible and respectable British citizens.

At the award ceremony, NRC's Policy and Delivery Manager, Pascale Vassie, shared: "The quality and range of teaching materials available to pupils and their parents was exceptional. The volunteers' enthusiasm for the school and commitment to give back to help younger children along the path of learning was a credit to the volunteers and a clear example as to why the BAPS Children's Forum has achieved the Gold Award."

**‘KARYAKARO, KARYA KARO’ NATIONAL
KARYAKAR SHIBIR**
8 July 2012, Leicester, UK



In the presence of Pujya Bhaktipriya Swami (Pujya Kothari Swami), over 800 *karyakars* from across the UK attended the National Karyakar Shibir held at BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Leicester.

The *shibir*, entitled “Karyakaro, Karya Karo”, was themed around the concepts of ‘Samjan’, ‘Sampark’, ‘Samay’ and ‘Dhani Thaine’ – collectively reinforcing the importance of developing spiritual understanding, building relationships, taking ownership and offering quality time in one’s responsibilities to help perform one’s *seva* to the highest spiritual standards.

**NATIONAL ADHIVESHAN AND KISHORE-KISHORI
SHIBIR**
24-27 August 2012, Warwick Conference Park,
UK



More than 450 *kishores* and *kishoris* gathered for the National UK Kishore-Kishori Mandal

Shibir and National Adhiveshan, 2012, at Warwick Conference Park in Coventry between 24 and 27 August 2012 in the presence of sadhus from India and London.

The *adhiveshan* took place on the first day. The *kishores* and *kishoris* participated in a variety of Satsang-based competitions which helped to strengthen their understanding of the Akshar-Purushottam *upasana* and develop their skills and talents through *mukhpath*, bhajans, *nirupans*, *akhyans*, *sankirtans*, *prasangs*, essays, *goshti*, art, dramas, instrumental music, web and photographic multimedia presentations. The judges comprising of sadhus from India and London and experienced volunteers from across the UK were impressed by the high standard of performance by the youths.

The *shibir*, based on the theme of ‘Rajipo’, began with a series of thought-provoking videos, and followed by Jnaneshwar Swami and Shrutiprakash Swami’s explanation on complex spiritual concepts and the evolving nature of *rajipo*.

In the evening session, Vivekjian Swami described the practical aspect of *rajipo* by discussing the conceptual aspect of the human thought process. Shukmuni Swami then enthralled the audience with a live rendition of the bhajan, ‘Ap Rijo Em Raji’.

The 2½ day *shibir* included speeches by Acharya Swami, Mukundcharan Swami, Shukmuni Swami and Yagnatilak Swami. The *shibir* concluded with a touching video of Swamishri in Ahmedabad with a garland of *malas* sent from the UK, providing the youths further impetus to continue their journey of *rajipo*.

NATIONAL YUVAK-YUVATI SHIBIR
25-27 August 2012, Warwick Conference Park,
UK

Over 470 youths from all over the UK attended the annual Yuvak-Yuvati Shibir based on the theme of ‘Shurvirta’ – ‘Fearlessness’ – in



the presence of experienced and learned BAPS sadhus from India and UK. The knowledge and inspiration gained from their talks was consolidated through questions and answers sessions, amusing and memorable sketches as well as group discussion sessions. The *shibir* was focused on understanding the five Principles stated by Yogiji Maharaj in the Yogi Gita and their practical application in daily life:

- Day 1: “**Think Different**” highlighted the principles of ‘Janvu’ and ‘Mukvu’, emphasizing that to become *shurvur* one has to think differently from the rest of the crowd.
- Day 2: “**Be Different**” incorporated the principle of ‘Karvu’, teaching that practically applying these thoughts in life is *shurvirta*.
- Day 3: “**The Difference**” explained the principles of ‘Samajvu’ and ‘Rakhvu’, thus encouraging the youths to be proud of ‘the difference’ of having attained Bhagwan Swaminarayan and guru Pramukh Swami Maharaj. To understand their glory and keep them at the centre of all activities will help one to be *shurvur*.

At the beginning of the *shibir* Swamishri blessed the youths by video, in which he clearly stated, “Understanding the glory of God and guru, and spreading this message is *shurvirta*.”

The speakers, Acharya Swami, Jnaneshwar Swami, Shrutiprakash Swami, Vivekjian Swami, Mukundcharan Swami, Satyavrat

Swami, Shukmuni Swami, Yagnatilak Swami and Amrutvihari Swami shared their wisdom with the audience.

SATSANG SHIBIR

29 August 2012, Paris



More than 150 devotees from France, Belgium and Germany gathered for a Satsang Shibir entitled ‘Kariye Raaji Ghanshyam’ in Paris on Wednesday 29 August 2012.

The *shibir* was structured around three key Satsang concepts – *mahima*, *milan* and *mamatva* – to develop a greater understanding of God, fellow devotees and the Satsang fellowship as a whole.

Five BAPS sadhus presided over the *shibir*, presenting and facilitating an assortment of activities, interactive exercises, bhajans and spiritual discourses.

Following the *shibir*, the participants took part in the evening *sabha* where all sadhus elaborated on their experiences of Pramukh Swami Maharaj.

SANYUKTA SATSANG SHIBIR

2 September 2012, London

On Sunday, 2 September a one-day *shibir* was held for senior devotees at the BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir, London. The theme was *Sarvetra Sukhinaha Santu* – ‘Let There be Happiness Everywhere’. Various speeches on ‘Vyavahar Shuddhi’, ‘Sarvopari Shri Hari’ and others by Acharya Swami, Jnaneshwar Swami,

Shrutiprakash Swami, Vivekjivan Swami, Mukundcharan Swami and others threw light on how to do indepth satsang. Audio-visual presentations and skits made the *shibir* interesting and effective. In all, 150 devotees attended the *shibir*.

North America

BAPS CHARITIES EDUCATION FAIR

10 June 2012, New York

Over 250 students and parents attended the BAPS Charities Education Fair for middle and high school students in which the participants were guided on all aspects of the education system, ranging from middle school decisions to college applications and admissions.

After the morning session on the power of education and the role of the parent, attendees were divided into two tracks: one for middle school (6th, 7th, 8th Grade) and another for high school (9th, 10th, 11th Grade).

The middle school seminar relayed the importance of choosing the correct high school. Students and parents learned the importance of enrolling in Advanced Placement Courses, how to get proper recommendations from teachers and the benefits of engaging in extracurricular activities during their high school years. Lastly, they were given tips and instructions for success on standardized exams such as the SAT and ACT.

The high school seminar included sessions on preparing for college early while still in high school, approaching the college application process, striving for admission into the best colleges, and applying for scholarships and financial aid.

Experienced volunteers also answered questions from parents and their children. The Education Fair increased awareness for the need of a successful and inspired the students to excel within their schools and professions.

Africa

BAPS YOUTHS ORGANISE 'WINTER WARMER DRIVE'

14 July 2012, Johannesburg, South Africa



BAPS South Africa organized its 7th annual 'Winter Warmer Drive' in Johannesburg to help underprivileged communities during the winter months. Barcelona, an outlying community of Johannesburg was the recipient of this year's drive.

Sadhus and over a 100 volunteers participated in this drive. A large variety of essential items like new blankets, candles, toys for children, clothing, shoes, etc. were donated. 'Winter Hampers' were also distributed, which contained food items like rice, tinned food, tea, etc. In addition, over 400 residents of the community were served a hot meal.

Asia Pacific

EDUCATION SEMINAR BY BAPS YOUTHS

28 July 2012, Sydney, Australia

To help students and their parents better understand the Australian school system and pathways into tertiary studies, this seminar began with a presentation which dispelled common misconceptions and provided valuable advice on subject selection.

The highlight of the evening was a panel discussion with BAPS youths, themselves successful students and professionals, on



their high school experience. It allowed the audience to look into the future as the BAPS youths shared their experience on study techniques, study-life balance, career opportunities and the importance of satsang and a positive environment whilst in school. At the various information stalls students and parents met professionals working in engineering, medicine, IT and law. The seminar was received positively by over 250 students, parents and guests.

- Liaison Officer from the New South Wales State Board of Studies, Ms Jennifer Michalski, said, "Such youthful people, you did something that the community needs."
- Principal of Rosehill Public School, Mr Peter Wood, commented, "All the panellists were very impressive in sharing their experiences, and what a great resource you have within the community for people to be able to talk to."
- Samir Bookseller, one of the parents, said, "It was very valuable for me being a new migrant to Australia. My son is in year 11, so this was a wonderful seminar for me as a parent to attend."
- Year 10 student Vedant Dave said, "Unlike other seminars I've been to where it's all just statistics-based, over here it was about study techniques and really what kind of support you need from parents."

CHILDREN'S CULTURAL PROGRAMME

22 July 2012, Adelaide, Australia



Children of the BAPS Bal Mandal in Adelaide presented a cultural programme to inspire satsang and *sanskars* as taught by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the Shikshapatri.

Around 40 *balaks* and young *kishores* performed dances and dramas on respecting parents, studying hard and keeping good company. They emphasized the importance of obeying the Shikshapatri to enjoy a happy and fruitful life. *Balaks* and *shishus* also gave an impressive *tabla* performance.

The audience of over 500 people were enthralled by the performances of the talented young children and the volunteer effort behind the event.

PARENTING TEENAGERS PANEL DISCUSSION

4 August 2012, Sydney, Australia

BAPS youths were invited to participate in a 'Parenting Teenagers in Cultural Context' seminar organized by the Gandhi Peace Centre Australia and Migrant Resource Centre, an Australian Government body, on 4 August 2012. BAPS children and youths presented a panel discussion on cultural identity, bridging the generation gap, peer pressure, the importance of good friends and Pramukh Swami Maharaj's universal message of family unity through *samuh bhojan* (daily family meals) and *ghar sabha* (family assemblies). The panel discussion focused on in-

stilling values, preserving culture and understanding heritage.

India

PRESIDENT OF INDIA VISITS SWAMINARAYAN AKSHARDHAM

9 July 2012, Delhi, India



The 12th President of India and the first woman to hold the office, H.E. Smt. Pratibha Devisingh Patil along with her spouse, Dr Devisingh Shekhawat, visited Swaminarayan Akshardham in New Delhi to experience India's ageless beauty, borderless culture and timeless values.

On behalf of Swaminarayan Akshardham and BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, Dr J.M. Dave and senior volunteers welcomed the President in traditional style by applying a *chandlo*, tying a sacred *nada chhadi* and garlanding her with a sanctified flower garland.

During her visit to the Swaminarayan Akshardham Cultural Complex, President Patil admired the Mayur Dwar (Peacock Gate) and experienced the Akshardham Mandir. Offering their respects and reverence, the President and Dr Shekhawat offered flower petals before the *murti* of Bhagwan Swaminarayan.

Captivated by the Akshardham Mandir, the President expressed, "This work of such magnitude and completion in five years cannot be done without the grace of God."

President Patil offered her respects and

prayers for India and world peace by offering *abhishek*, the ceremonial pouring of sanctified water from 151 holy rivers, lakes and ponds across India on the sacred image of Shri Neelkanth Varni. Thereafter, the delegation participated in the Maha Arti and viewed the musical fountain show, 'The Cycle of Life.'

Delighted with her experience, President Patil wrote, "Divinity has been glorified by the beautiful artistic carvings par excellence. It enriches the serenity of devotion and faith which is sublime. In addition, this is an artistic wonder with human imagination which gives a fantastic experience made melodious with water and music. My pranams to Swamiji and all the devotees. Thanks."

Dr Devisingh Shekhawat commented on his experience by writing, "I am fortunate to visit the Swaminarayan Temple after our 47th marriage anniversary. I have a deep feeling that I will get peace and harmony in the future and also wish that for all the millions of devotees who visit this shrine of Swaminarayan – who is an epitome of wisdom and the almighty God."

6TH BAPS TEACHERS TRAINING CONFERENCE 11-12 August, BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir, Raisan, Gujarat



Around 100 teachers from BAPS schools in Raisan, Vadodara, Silvassa, Valsad, Nagpur and Mt. Abu attended the 6th Teachers Training Conference held at the BAPS Swaminarayan Vidyamandir in Raisan, near Ahmedabad, Gujarat.

The conference was conducted by a team of experienced teachers from ‘The Swaminarayan School’ in London, led by Umesh Raja, Head of Preparatory School.

They presented ideas and methods that teachers can use to enhance their teaching skills and to help students learn more effectively. The topics covered included the use of thinker keys, multiple intelligence, identifying and coaching gifted students, developing a child’s character and outdoor learning.

Through interactive sessions, the teachers were guided on how to apply these concepts into their teaching methods.

N.K. Sinha, Principal, BAPS Vadodara, commented, “These days teachers tend not to

listen, but such seminars remind and teach us to have interactive classroom sessions.”

A. Sarvanan, Academic In-Charge, BAPS Mt. Abu, said, “This seminar has taught me that only qualifications are not important, but teachers should be trained in identifying the qualities of students. The practical methods taught here will be of great benefit.”

The team from London were also pleased by how their guidance over the years has helped the teachers and students. Umesh Raja expressed, “Since our last visit, students have improved and now they have started thinking for themselves.”

Teachers from all the various BAPS School thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated the conference. ♦

(Contd. from pg. 50)

4 June, Sarangpur

Q. Because of base instincts (*swabhavs*) one tends to perceive human traits (*manushyabhav*) in the Gunatit Sadhu. What should we do to prevent this?

A. Obey *agna*, maintain saintliness (*sadhuta*) and do bhajan.

9 June, Sarangpur

Q. Swami, are our visas to Akshardham guaranteed?

A. Yes, if you maintain saintliness and engage

yourself in listening to *katha-varta*, obeying *agna* and not finding faults (*avgun*) in others.

9 July, Ahmedabad

Q. What should we do to avoid *abhav-avgun*?

A. One should follow (*satsang*) and not see whether others are following it or not. Look at oneself and see whether one is following it or not. Perceive all to be good, as devotees of God, as doing *seva* and also understand their glory (*mahima*). ♦

Source from Gujarati text: Sadhu Priyadarshandas
Translation: Sadhu Vivekjivandas

(Contd. from pg. 35)

perspective. The supporting facts and testamentary evidences have been provided in precise locations and in an appropriate manner. The myth of “Aryan settlement” theory and its influence on an existing civilization has been broken in a very professional way. Specifically, the author has taken pains to explain the idea that the references to wars and weapons in the Vedic literature has particular associations to the events and interactions among communities that were existing in the sub-continent at those points of

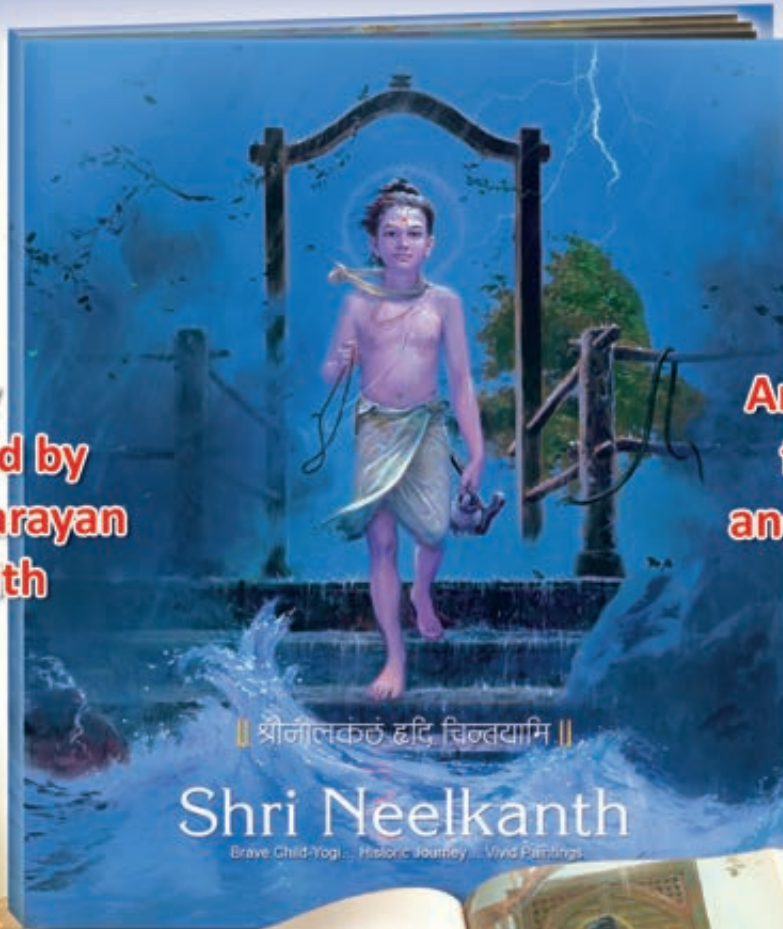
time. He draws support for this view from the extensive research and surveys that have been done by archeologists. He emphasizes the fact that Indian culture is one that comprehensively emanates from Vedic literature and traditions.

There is no doubt that this book (two parts) would definitely be a guide and inspiration for every student/scholar who wishes to know more about Hinduism in its true magnificence and its grand social perspective. I am sure every reader would like to possess this with a sense of pride. ♦

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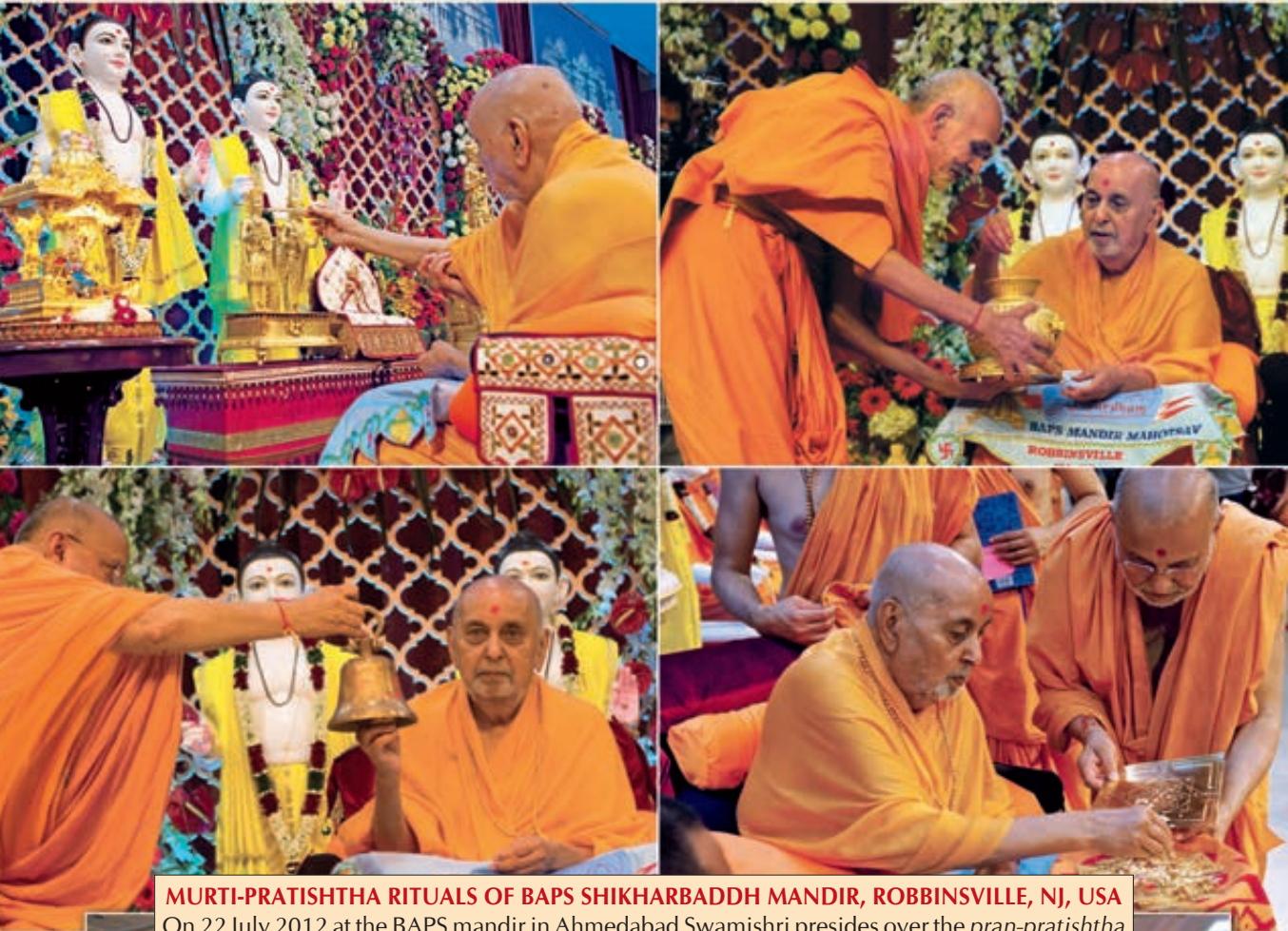
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MURTI-PRATISHTHA RITUALS OF BAPS SHIKHARBADDH MANDIR, ROBBINSVILLE, NJ, USA

On 22 July 2012 at the BAPS mandir in Ahmedabad Swamishri presides over the *pran-pratishtha* ceremony for the BAPS *shikharbaddh* mandir under construction at the Akshardham complex in New Jersey, USA. Swamishri sanctifies the devoutly peeled rice grains, rings the bell and performs *pujan* of the *sthan* yantras in the presence of thousands of devotees.

